

Durham E-Theses

Michael Costa, England's First Conductor: The Revolution in Musical Performance in England 1830-80.

GOULDEN, JOHN

How to cite:

GOULDEN, JOHN (2012) *Michael Costa, England's First Conductor: The Revolution in Musical Performance in England 1830-80.* , Durham theses, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/5924/>

Use policy

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in Durham E-Theses
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full Durham E-Theses policy](#) for further details.

Academic Support Office, Durham University, University Office, Old Elvet, Durham DH1 3HP
e-mail: e-theses.admin@dur.ac.uk Tel: +44 0191 334 6107
<http://etheses.dur.ac.uk>

Abstract

Michael Costa, England's First Conductor: The Revolution in Musical Performance in England 1830-80.

Recent literature has thrown new light on the patronage, financing and social context of the music industry in nineteenth-century London. One area that has received less attention is the management and direction of musical performance – a branch of the profession which arguably changed more than any other.

The thesis seeks to identify the radical changes in this area through the life and work of Michael Costa. His fifty-three year career in charge of the main London musical institutions saw the transition from divided control by the violin-leader, musical director and *maestro al cembalo* to unified control by a professional conductor-manager, of which he was the London prototype. Costa's uniquely powerful position in the operatic, symphonic and choral world enabled him to embed reforms that laid the basis for much of modern musical practice: not only in baton-conducting but also in the conductor's contractual powers, orchestral discipline, the lay-out of performers, rehearsal strategy, acoustics, and the system for managing the enlarged orchestras and choruses which emerged in the period. This infrastructure and the raised standards of performance that these reforms fostered were arguably the greatest achievement of English music in the otherwise rather barren mid-Victorian period.

The thesis considers Costa's crucial role in the battles between the two rival opera houses, between the Philharmonic and the New Philharmonic, and between the venerable Ancient Concerts and the mass festival events of the Sacred Harmonic Society. It tries also to place him in the context of the profound aesthetic changes of the period – in repertoire, performance and attitude to musical 'works'. Finally it seeks to

explain the remarkable rise and eclipse of Costa's reputation and to reassess in its contemporary context Costa's contribution to the emergence of the music industry in the form which we know today.

Michael Costa, England's First Conductor:
The Revolution in Musical Performance in England
1830-80

John Goulden

Dissertation submitted for the Ph.D. degree in Musicology, Durham University (2012).

Contents

Illustrations	10
Abbreviations	14
Statement of Copyright	16
Acknowledgments	16
Chapter 1: Introduction, Sources and Methodology	17
1.1 Introduction	18
1.2 Sources	23
1.2.1 Primary Sources	23
1.2.2 Secondary Sources	25
1.2.3 The Press	30
1.3 Methodology	35
Chapter 2: Formative Influences and Personality	40
2.1 Naples	41
2.2 Birmingham	43
2.3 Early years at the Italian Opera	45
2.4 The Outsider	53
2.5 Costa's Quest for Acceptance	57
2.6 Personality	62
Chapter 3: Conducting Prior to 1830	72
3.1 The Theory: Leader, Maestro al Cembalo and Musical Director	74

3.3 The Composer-conductors	93
3.4 The Entrepreneur-conductors	99
3.5 The Beginnings of Reform in England	102
Chapter 4: Costa's System	107
4.1 Costa's Reforms: Undivided Control and the Baton	109
4.2 Costa's Reforms: The Substance	118
4.2.1 Management of the musicians	118
Numbers	118
Pay	119
Standards	120
Discipline	122
4.2.2 Lay-out and acoustics	124
4.2.3 Rehearsals	131
4.2.4 Infrastructure and Coordination	140
4.3 The Conductor-Manager	143
Chapter 5: Costa as a Conductor	148
5.1 Contractual power	148
5.2 Conducting style	152
5.3 Technique	154
5.3.1 Communication	154
5.3.2 Beat	156
5.3.3 Tempo	159
5.4 Aesthetics	160

5.4.1 Interpretation	160
5.4.2 Volume	162
5.5 The Protocol and Metaphors of Conducting	165
5.6 Comparisons with other Conductors and Orchestras	170
Chapter 6: Her Majesty's Theatre: 1829-58	177
6.1 The Music Market	177
6.2 Laporte (1829-41)	180
6.3 Lumley (1841-46)	182
6.4 Competition (1846-58)	186
6.4.1 The Phoney War: 1846	187
6.4.2 The First Campaign: 1847-49	190
6.4.3 The Commonwealth and Gye's take-over: 1849-52	202
6.4.4 Covent Garden's Monopoly: 1853-56	208
6.4.5 The Fire and Resumption of War: 1856-58	209
Chapter 7: Covent Garden: Costa and Gye: 1850-69	212
7.1 The Costa-Gye Partnership	212
7.2 Issues of Opera Management	220
7.2.1 Finances	221
7.2.2 Authority	223
Rehearsals	224
Moonlighting	226
Deputy Conductor	228
Extra nights	229
Musical authority	229

Management of the Opera House	231
7.3 The Split	233
7.4 Costa-Mapleson Partnership: 1871-9	249
Chapter 8: The Concert and Oratorio Scene	253
8.1 Concert Life in London	253
8.2 Private aristocratic Concerts	255
8.3 Opera concerts	258
8.4 The Philharmonic	259
8.5 Costa at the Philharmonic	263
8.6 The Sacred Harmonic Society	274
8.7 The Festivals	281
Chapter 9: Composing, Arranging and Repertory	292
9.1 Composing	292
9.1.2 Don Carlos (1844)	294
9.1.3 Incidental and occasional music	297
9.1.4 Eli (1855)	300
9.1.5 Naaman (1865)	302
9.2 Re-arrangement	306
9.2.1 Abbreviation	307
9.2.2 Pastiche	309
9.2.3 Substitution	311
9.2.4 Re-orchestration	312
Opera	312

Symphonic	315
Choral	317
9.3 Repertory	321
9.3.1 Operatic	323
9.3.2 Symphonic	327
9.3.3 Choral	330
9.4 Costa's Tastes and Relations with Contemporaries	332
9.5 Overview	339
Chapter 10: Costa's Significance in English Music	341
10.1 The Last years	341
10.2 Reputation	342
10.3 Decline of Reputation	345
10.4 A Reassessment of Costa's Significance in English Music	352
Appendices	367
Appendix A: Contracts	367
A.1 Costa's Contract at Her Majesty's Theatre	367
A.2 Costa's Contract at The Philharmonic	373
A.3 Costa's Contract at Covent Garden	374
A.4 Orchestra and Chorus contracts	390
Appendix B: Costa's correspondence	399
B.1 Correspondence with Gye	399
B.2 Correspondence with Bartholomew	403
B.3 Correspondence with Rossini	407
Appendix C: Costa's lay-out at the Philharmonic.	418

Appendix D: Costa's Compositions	421
D.1 Operas	421
D.2 Operatic Insertions	421
D.3 Ballets	422
D.4 Oratorios	422
D.5 Cantatas	422
D.6 Instrumental works	423
D.7 Arias, songs etc	423
D.8 Miscellaneous vocal and Choral	425
D.9 Discography	425
Appendix E: Philharmonic Repertoire	427
E.1 Philharmonic: Composition of programmes	427
E.2 Philharmonic: Average number of works per concert	427
E.3 Philharmonic: Symphonies performed (by Composers)	428
E.4 Philharmonic repertoire (by Composers)	428
E.5 Philharmonic: Overall repertoire.	429
E.6 New works as a percentage of the operatic repertoire	429
Bibliography	431
a. Original manuscripts	431
b. Primary Sources	431
c. Secondary Sources	434

Illustrations

Page	Figure	Illustration
17	Fig. 1.1	Michael Costa in 1831.
24	Fig. 1.2	Frederick Gye (© National Portrait Gallery, London).
25	Figs 1.3/4	John Ella and George Grove.
30	Figs 1.5/6	J.W. Davison and Henry Chorley.
40	Fig. 2.1	Costa caricature (<i>The Entr'Acte</i> , 25 Feb. 1882).
42	Figs 2.2/3	Giacomo Tritto and Niccolo Zingarelli.
46	Fig. 2.4	The King's Theatre, 1837.
46	Fig. 2.5	Nicholas Bochsa.
48	Figs 2.6/8	Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient, Maria Malibran and Henriette Sontag.
50	Figs 2.9/10	Monck Mason and Paganini.
54	Fig. 2.11	'Foreigners' in Punch alphabet (<i>Punch</i> , 21 Aug. 1841, 62).
56	Fig. 2.12	Caricature Italian conductor (<i>ILN</i> , 30 Dec. 1843, 430).
59	Figs 2.13/14	Costa portraits.
60	Figs 2.15/17	Costa caricatures.
72	Fig. 3.1	Tom Hulce in the film <i>Amadeus</i> : an anachronistic image of 18th-century 'conducting'.
77	Fig. 3.2	Covent Garden stage, c1800.
79	Fig. 3.3	François-Antoine Habeneck.
88	Figs 3.4/6	Sir George Smart, Sir Henry Bishop and Ignaz Moscheles.
91	Figs 3.7/8	François-Joseph Fétis and Hector Berlioz.
95	Figs 3.9/10	Louis Spohr and Carl Maria von Weber.
98	Fig. 3.11	Mendelssohn.
99	Figs 3.12/13	Philippe Musard and Louis Jullien.
101	Fig. 3.14	Jullien conducting, 1846.
105	Fig. 3.15	Hanover Square Rooms, 1843.
107	Fig. 4.1	Covent Garden before the 1856 fire (<i>ILN</i> , 6 Dec. 1856, 562).
110	Fig. 4.2	Hippolyte Chélaré.
115	Fig. 4.3	Costa at Her Majesty's Theatre, 1843.
115	Fig. 4.4	Costa at Covent Garden, 1847.

116	Fig. 4.5	State Visit to Covent Garden, 1855.
117	Fig. 4.6	Costa cartoon (<i>Vanity Fair</i> , 6 July 1862).
125	Fig. 4.7	Philharmonic lay-out in 1840 (<i>Musical World</i> , 6 Feb.1840, 83).
126	Fig. 4.8	Cartoon of Jullien conducting Prom concert (<i>Punch</i> , 1849, 245).
126	Fig. 4.9	Costa's Philharmonic lay-out, 1846.
128	Fig. 4.10	King's Theatre, Rowlandson's aquatini, 1809.
129	Fig. 4.11	Her Majesty's Theatre, 1844.
129	Fig. 4.12	Covent Garden pit, 1847-56.
141	Fig. 4.13	Handel Festival lay-out (<i>ILN</i> , 13 June 1857, 571).
151	Figs 5.1/2	Playbills for 1832 and 1844.
151	Figs 5.3/4	Playbills for 1839 and 1850.
163	Figs 5.5/6	Caricatures of Berlioz.
163	Figs 5.7/8	Caricatures of Costa (<i>Punch</i> , 3 June 1882) and Jullien (<i>ILN</i> , 1849, 136).
177	Fig. 6.1	Costa in 1835 (courtesy Bristol University Theatre Collection).
180	Figs 6.2/4	Giulia Grisi, Luigi Lablache and Giovanni Battista Rubini.
180	Figs 6.5/7	Fanny Persiani, Luigi Tamburini and Giovanni Mario.
182	Fig. 6.8	Benjamin Lumley.
184	Fig. 6.9	Costa's <i>Don Carlos</i> and <i>Alma</i> , 1844.
191	Fig. 6.10	Marietta Alboni and Jenny Lind.
193	Fig. 6.11	Covent Garden opening (<i>ILN</i> , 10 April 1847, 225).
200	Fig. 6.12	Balfe conducting Concert at Her Majesty's (<i>ILN</i> , 26 Oct.1850).
203	Fig. 6.13	<i>La Juive</i> , Covent Garden, 1850.
205	Fig. 6.14	<i>La tempesta</i> , Her Majesty's, 1850.
206	Fig. 6.15	<i>Don Giovanni</i> , Her Majesty's, 1846.
208	Figs 6.16/7	<i>Le prophète</i> , Covent Garden, 1849 and Giacomo Meyerbeer.
209	Fig. 6.18	<i>Il trovatore</i> , Covent Garden, 1855.
212	Fig. 7.1	Frederick Gye.
213	Fig. 7.2	Letter from Costa to Gye (author's collection).
217	Fig. 7.3	Covent Garden fire, 1856.
219	Fig. 7.4	Barry's design for Covent Garden, 1857.
231	Fig. 7.5	Patti's homage to Costa.

232	Figs 7.6/7	Adelina Patti and Therese Tietjens.
238	Fig. 7.8	‘Colonel’ Mapleson.
239	Fig. 7.9	Caricature of Gye and Mapleson companies, 1868.
241	Fig. 7.10	Luigi Arditi.
251	Fig. 7.11	Mapleson’s National Opera House, 1875.
255	Fig. 8.1	Private concert programme, 1849.
258	Fig. 8.2	Opera concert programme, 1847.
270	Fig. 8.3	William Sterndale Bennett.
274	Fig. 8.4	SHS concert, 1840.
275	Fig. 8.5	Costa’s first oratorio concert, 1835.
279	Fig. 8.6	<i>Samson</i> , SHS.
282	Fig. 8.7	The Crystal Palace at Sydenham.
283	Fig. 8.8	Handel Festival (<i>ILN</i> , 27 June 1857, 630-1).
284	Fig. 8.9	Costa conducting Handel Festival.
286	Fig. 8.10.	Distin’s ‘monster drum’ (<i>ILN</i> , 27 June 1857, 627).
290	Fig. 8.11	The Albert Hall, 1871.
291	Figs 8.12/13	August Manns and Charles Halle.
295	Fig. 9.1	‘T’amai qual’aman gli angeli’.
298	Fig. 9.2	‘Ecco quel fiere istante’.
301	Fig. 9.3	‘The March of the Israelites.’
311	Fig. 9.4	Costa’s aria inserted into Donizetti’s <i>L’esule di Roma</i> .
318	Fig. 9.5	Costa’s version of <i>Saul</i> .
336	Fig. 9.6	Caricature of Costa and Gounod (Bennett, <i>Forty Years of Music</i> , 291).
341	Fig. 10.1	Costa in 1882.
359	Fig. 10.2	Rehearsal under Arditi at Her Majesty’s.
364	Fig. 10.3	<i>Don Carlos</i> , Covent Garden, 1867.

Appendices

398	Fig. A.3	Ella’s contract at Her Majesty’s Theatre.
426	Fig. D.1	Giosselina’s aria from <i>Malek Ahdel</i> .

Sources: Most of the illustrations are from the author's own collection or that of the late Tony Gasson. Other *ILN* and *Punch* illustrations are courtesy of Westminster City Libraries. Except where indicated, the musical illustrations are courtesy of the Opera Rara collection.

Abbreviations

BL	British Library.
Dideriksen	Gabriella Dideriksen. 'Repertory and Rivalry: Opera at the Second Covent Garden Theatre 1830-56' (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1997).
Ella Diary	Diary of John Ella, The John Ella Collection, Faculty of Music Library, The Bodleian Library, Oxford, Mss 163.
Ella	John Ella Collection, Faculty of Music Library, The Bodleian Library, Oxford, Mss 163.
<i>ILN</i>	<i>Illustrated London News</i> .
Grove 1	<i>A Dictionary of Music and Musicians</i> . Grove 1 (1879-89); Grove 2 (1904-10), New Grove 1 (1980) etc.
Gye	Diary of Frederick Gye, ROHC and National Museum of the Performing Arts, Tavistock Street, London.
<i>MW</i>	<i>Musical World</i> .
<i>Musical Times</i>	Covers also <i>The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular</i> (1844-1902).
<i>QMMR</i>	<i>Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review</i> .
QVJ	Queen Victoria's Journal, Royal Archives, Windsor.
RA	Royal Archives, Windsor.
RCMA	Royal College of Music Archives, London.

Ringel	Matthew Ringel, ‘Opera in the Donizettian Dark Ages: Management, Competition and Artistic Policy in London 1861-70’ (Ph D diss., University of London, 1996).
Ringel and Dideriksen	Matthew Ringel and Gabriella Dideriksen, ‘Frederick Gye and “the Dreadful Business of Opera Management”’, <i>Nineteenth-Century Music</i> , XIX/1 (Summer 1995).
RMU	<i>Record of the Musical Union</i> .
ROHC	Royal Opera House Collections.
SHS	Sacred Harmonic Society.
V&A	Theatre and Performance Department, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

To avoid confusion about the many various titles given to operas in the nineteenth-century (*Die Zauberflöte*, *Il flauto magico*, *The Magic Flute*, *La Flute Enchantée*), they are described in this study by the title of the main first production, except when expressed differently in quotations. For simplicity, the theatre at Covent Garden, which performed many functions and was variously known as the Theatre Royal and the Royal Italian Opera, is here referred to as Covent Garden.

All italics within quotations are inserted by the author. Emphasis inserted by the original source is marked by underlining.

Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

Acknowledgments

I acknowledge in particular the advice and supervision of Professor Bennett Zon. In addition I have received valuable advice and pointers from Professor Bill Weber, Professor Simon McVeigh, Professor Michael Musgrave, Professor Jeremy Commons, Christine Bashford, Beverly Wilcox and Laura Macy. My research work was greatly helped by the generous assistance I received from Francesca Franchi and the staff of the Royal Opera House Archives; Dr Peter Horton at the Royal College of Music Library and Paul Collen at the RCM's Centre for Performance History; Diane Clements, of the London Library and Museum of Freemasonry; Martin Holmes at the Oxford Faculty of Music Library; Katherine Hogg, Librarian at the Gerald Coke Handel Collection in the Foundling Museum; Stephanie Puel at the Université François-Rabelais de Tours; Janet Snowman at the Royal Academy of Music Museum and Collections; Stephen Revell for giving me access to the Opera Rara collection; Martin Bird, the Editor of the Elgar Society Journal; and the staff at the London Theatre Museum and the Theatre and Performance Department of the Victoria and Albert Museum at Olympia.

I am also grateful for the kind assistance from the following sources: Miss Pamela Clark, Registrar of the Royal Archives at Windsor, citations from which are given with the permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Susan Gasson kindly agreed to the inclusion of material from the personal collection of the late Tony Gasson.

Chapter 1: Introduction, Sources and Methodology

'The proper way to study the music of the past...is to study it in relation to the time and the circumstances that produced it, for art is a reflection as well as an expression of its own time and culture.' Edwin J Stringham, writing in the Introduction to Warren Dwight Allen, *Philosophies of Music History* (New York: Dover, 1962).



Fig. 1.1 Michele Costa in 1831.

1.1 Introduction

Michael Costa was, for most of his fifty-three year career, the dominant musician in England. Today he is one of the most neglected of the leading figures from the mid-nineteenth-century, a period that is itself still neglected and often disparaged. But his speciality (conducting) and his main activity (orchestral and choral management) went through more profound changes during his lifetime than in any period before or since. His career is therefore a highly suitable optic through which to analyse these changes.

Although aware of Costa as a musical footnote, I first took an interest in him when I bought a flat in the London house where he lived for thirty years. Looking him up in the accessible literature, I encountered two distinct views of Costa. His contemporaries saw him as the man who reformed and disciplined the main London musical institutions – operatic, orchestral and oratorical – lifting them from mediocrity to Continental levels and creating in the process a formidable power base and a new management system. Later generations regarded him as the leading symbol of the vices of early Victorian music: the indulgence (as a composer as well as conductor) in superannuated bel canto opera and the Mendelssohnian style; the rejection of the new wave represented by Wagner and Berlioz; the penchant for re-orchestrating the classics and performing them on a gargantuan scale; and a conducting style that was metronomic rather than interpretative. After Costa's death in 1884, the second view prevailed as he was first caricatured and then forgotten.

The fluctuations of Costa's musical reputation, which are examined in Chapter 10, provide a barometric reading of the musical climate of the last century and a half. The need for reassessment has acquired urgency in the light of recent scholarly analysis of the nature of the pre-modern music industry – its orchestra (by Spitzer and Zaslaw),

repertoire and canon (Weber), aesthetics (Goehr) and socio-economic context (Hall-Witt, Bashford).¹ Modern musicology is now sensitive to the need for a more historical and less positivist view of the context in which music was performed. Two aspects of this context need emphasising in order to assess fairly the contribution of Costa and his contemporaries.

The first is the conceptual barrier that Ernest Newman tellingly identified between the bel canto era and the styles and aesthetics of Verdi and especially Wagner, which so thoroughly obscured the earlier period. Newman observed that Italian bel canto opera presents the music historian with ‘almost insoluble problems...These people had certain ways of looking at music that were so different from ours that we cannot enter into them by any effort of the imagination’.² To understand Costa and his contemporaries, it is necessary to enter a world where middle Verdi did not yet exist and where Wagner meant *Rienzi*; where Liszt was a piano-virtuoso and not a composer and where Schubert’s symphonies had not yet been discovered; where modernity meant Mendelssohn’s *Elijah* and Meyerbeer’s *Robert le diable*; where the ornamental skills of singers like Maria Malibran (Fig. 2.7) and Giuditta Pasta were valued more highly than the declamatory power of Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient (Fig. 2.6). It is a period which has suffered perhaps more than any other from the neglect and contempt of musicological positivists for whom the tests of creativity are originality and innovation. Costa’s period came to be seen by future generations as dominated by the innovative composers (Berlioz, Schumann, Liszt and Wagner) and the virtuoso conductors (Richter, von Bülow). But the contemporary figures who featured most on the concert and opera programmes of those years were Rossini, Mendelssohn, Meyerbeer, Spohr

¹ Notes 4 and 5 below outline the main *recent* scholarship on this period.

² Chorley, ed. Ernest Newman, *Thirty Years of Musical Recollections* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926, 1926), xvi-xx.

and many whose names are now forgotten. Music performance was dominated not by composer-conductors but by the pioneers of the new profession of conducting: in particular Musard and Habeneck in France, Guhr and Chélaré in Germany and Costa in London.

The second contextual barrier is the fundamental change in the musical climate – a change which William Weber argues convincingly was more radical in music than in literature or the visual arts.³ The main ingredients of this change have been illuminated by recent scholarship.⁴ Prominent among them was the switch from a miscellaneous concert repertoire (combining operatic and virtuoso elements, mainly contemporary works, presented to a broadly-based clientele) to more specialised programmes, built around a hierarchy of genres, each catering to more homogeneous audiences. The switch can be caricatured in the move from the sociable audience of the 1830s, promenading in a well-lit hall, to the silent congregation of the 1850s, listening with the aid of concert notes to symphonies, chamber works or oratorios in a darkened auditorium. In parallel there was a profound aesthetic shift from viewing music as part of an *event* (created by the audience and performers as well as the composers) to

3 William Weber, *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3.

4 On the cultural-intellectual changes see Phyllis Weliver, 'The Musical Crowd in English Fiction, 1840-1910. Class, Culture and Nation' (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) and Tim Blanning, 'The Commercialisation and Sacralisation of European Culture in the Nineteenth-Century' in T.C.W. Blanning, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Also Christina Bashford, *The pursuit of High Culture: John Ella and Chamber Music in Victorian London* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007). On the musical profession, Deborah Rohr, *The Careers of British Musicians 1750-1850: A profession of Artisans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); on the orchestra John Spitzer and Neal Zaslaw, *The Birth of the Orchestra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Cyril Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

treating it as a finished *work* which demanded strict attention to the original score.⁵

These changes called for tighter direction of orchestras and choirs, which were themselves becoming larger and better trained, and a higher degree of professionalisation of the ancillary functions – agents, publishers, critics, designers, stage-managers.

In the perceived, if over-simplified, cleavage which was opening up between social and serious, Italian and German, aristocratic and erudite, Costa's early years in the opera house and the private salon concerts identified him firmly with the former tendencies. Although his duties obliged him to follow the trend of the repertoire into the world of Verdi, Bizet and even Wagner, he was branded as being on the aesthetically unfashionable side of the divide. The next generation of British music critics, catching up belatedly with the new aesthetics from the Continent, mainly saw him as a survivor from what George Bernard Shaw described as 'the Donizettian Dark Ages'.⁶ Because of his prominence, Costa was seen as the leading symbol of the conservatism and shallow bel canto fashions which were keeping England behind other European music capitals.

This is the broad context in which Costa's musical reputation needs to be reassessed. As the sins of the Donizettian Dark Ages dissolve into context, it is easier to appreciate Costa's strengths and weaknesses. This thesis seeks to analyse the reforms which he imposed on London's four main musical institutions; to assess his contribution to the rapid evolution of what became the music industry in the middle decades of the century; and to describe his impact on orchestral standards. It aims to understand Costa (and his

⁵ On the aesthetic shift see William Weber, *The Rise of Musical Classics in 18th Century England: a Study in Canon, Ritual and Ideology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) and Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Musical Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 148-287. On the social significance of the transition from 'event' to 'work' in the opera house see Jennifer Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts, opera and elite culture in London, 1780-1880* (University of New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2007), 23-57.

⁶ *Shaw's Music*, ed. Dan H. Lawrence (London: Bodley Head, 1981), vol. 2, 218.

generation) in the context of their period, rather than through the optic of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Any examination of Costa's career needs to address its negative elements. He cultivated an austere image and many of his professional relationships ended in acrimony. He contributed to his conservative reputation by refusing to conduct some works of the new schools and by disdaining to respond to the fashion for freer interpretation and more demonstrative conducting. Even in his main sphere – that of musical management – Costa's individual role has been somewhat exaggerated, in that he was the vehicle for reforms which were being implemented across Europe, rather than their initiator. Nor is this a campaign to revive Costa's *oeuvre*, though some worthwhile works are identified in Chapter 9.

But Costa was important both for his reforms in orchestra direction and music management and for his success over five decades in raising the standards of operatic, choral and symphonic performance. He established conducting as an essential (and respectable) part of the music profession. He helped to develop the techniques of baton, audition, rehearsal and lay-out on which modern performance rests. He was the main artistic force behind the success of London's two opera houses. He, more than anyone else, created the quintessential Victorian music festival. These legacies give him a claim to be one of the key figures in the painfully slow process by which England sought to demonstrate that, in terms of musical performance at least, it was no longer a 'Land Without Music'.

The thesis concentrates on the two most striking features of his career: his creation of what I argue was a new system for controlling and managing musicians (Chapters 3 to 5); and his rigorous application of that system to the the operatic, symphonic and choral

world (Chapters 6 to 8). Both of these themes raise problems of evidence and methodology which need to be tackled from the start.

1.2 Sources

1.2.1 Primary Sources

In contrast to the conductors Charles Halle and Luigi Arditi or the managers Benjamin Lumley and ‘Colonel’ Mapleson, Costa left no memoirs. Unlike the other main manager in his career, Frederick Gye, he did not keep a diary. There is no biography, of the kind written by near contemporaries about the organist George Smart, the critic J.W.Davison, the conductor Charles Halle or the composers Michael Balfe and William Sterndale Bennett. The only primary sources which relate substantively to him are of three kinds.

First, there are six contracts and related letters which illustrate the process by which he built up his unprecedented powers. They throw important light on his system and on the reasons behind his split, first with Lumley in 1846 and with Gye in 1869. Because they also offer valuable insights into the organisation of music in mid-Victorian England as well as into Costa’s personality and musical creed, they are set out in more detail in Appendix A.

Second there are three sets of correspondence which put a little flesh on Costa’s two-dimensional public figure. There are many letters between Costa and Gye which illuminate their bumpy partnership of 21 years at Covent Garden. There are 26 letters to his ‘dearest friend’, the librettist Bartholomew, which reveal a surprisingly emotional man, anxious for friendship and acceptance, with a sense of humour, albeit rather heavy. Finally there are 45 extraordinary letters from Rossini and one reply from Costa, which are one of the most surprising aspects of the whole Costa story (Appendix B).

The third key source is the remarkable daily Diary of the Covent Garden manager and lessee, Frederick Gye (Fig. 1.2), which covers the period from 1847 to 1878.⁷ This inevitably provides Gye's misanthropic perspective on most of his contemporaries and ends on a note of antagonism towards Costa. Gye was primarily an entrepreneur, pre-occupied with non-musical issues. But he was an intelligent man of wide intellectual

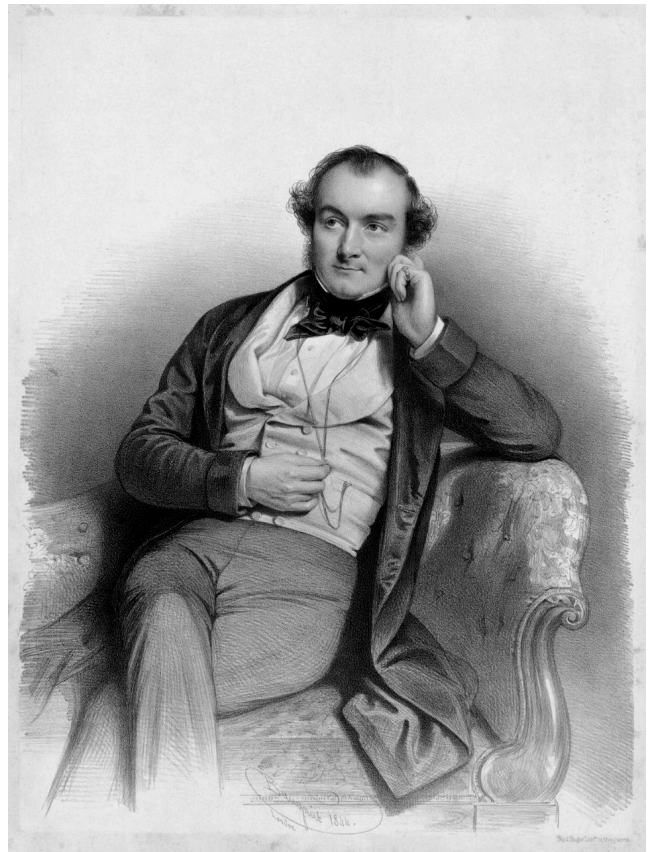


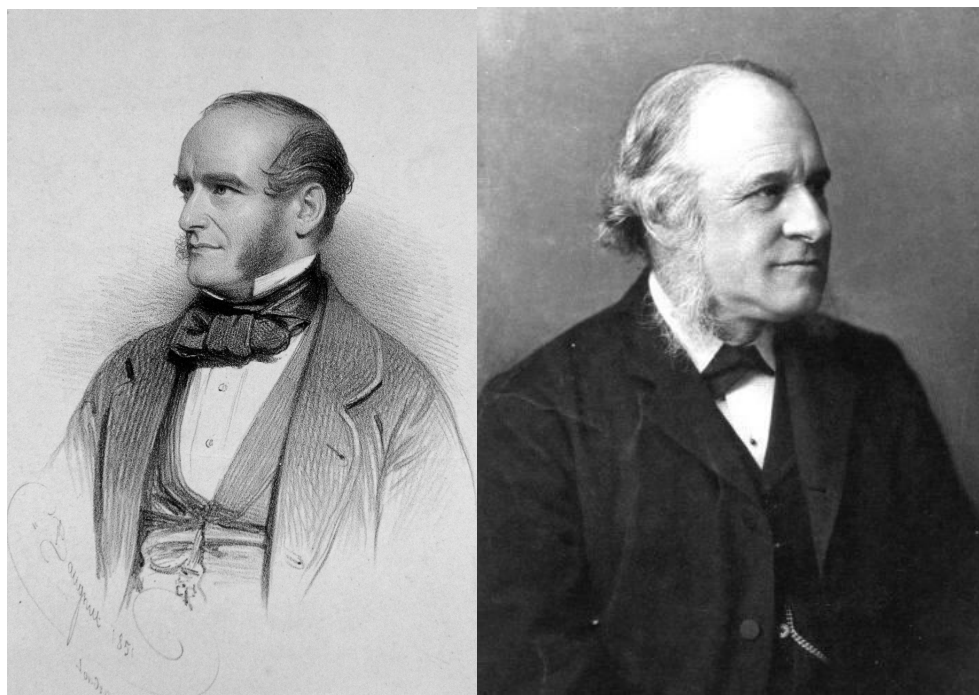
Fig. 1.2 Frederick Gye the Younger (1810-78) (© National Portrait Gallery, London).

interests and his frank daily jottings provide insights not available for any other musical relationship during this period. The richness of this Diary makes it hard to form a balanced judgement of the respective contributions of Gye and Costa to the success of Covent Garden. Gye's version inevitably dominates the analyses by Gabriella Didericksen and Matthew Ringel which, though invaluable, tend to overstate Gye's role.⁸ Unfortunately there is no balancing source, since Costa's friend the critic Henry Chorley (Fig. 1.6) destroyed more than 5000 letters in the days before his death and took care to exclude from his autobiographical material 'any word that can give private

⁷ Frederick Gye's Diaries are located in the Diary Collection, ROHC. The 1847 volume is held at the National Museum of the Performing Arts in Tavistock Street, London.

⁸ Matthew Ringel and Gabriella Didericksen, 'Frederick Gye and "the Dreadful Business of Opera Management"', *19th-Century Music*, XIX/1 (Summer 1995) (hereafter 'Ringel and Didericksen').

pain'.⁹ Indeed, the other main primary source – the prolific Berlioz – calls for careful and in some cases sceptical reading (Chapter 9.4).



Figs 1.3/4. Two who viewed Costa differently: John Ella, violinist and chamber concert pioneer; and George Grove, lexicographer.

1.2.2 Secondary Sources

The secondary sources are also questionable. There are a few reminiscences by well-disposed contemporaries – the violinist John Ella (Fig. 1.3), Chorley, William Spark and John Edmund Cox. These generally reflect nostalgia for the tastes of their younger days and for Costa's ground-breaking achievements in the 1830s and 40s. Some are clearly hyperbolic, as in Cox's claim that the arrival of Costa – along with that of Mendelssohn – was 'an event which had more to do with the progress of music in England than had ever happened before or since'.¹⁰

These fond recollections are offset by accounts from less sympathetic contemporaries such as George Grove (Fig. 1.4) and the critic J.W. Davison (Fig. 1.5). Grove's

⁹ Chorley obituary in *Athenaeum* (24 Feb. 1872), 249.

¹⁰ John Edmund Cox, *Musical Recollections of the Last Half-Century* (London: Lensley Bros, 1872), 177.

assessment in the *Pall Mall Gazette* of 1884 (Chapter 5) provides a valuable corrective to the deferential obituaries on Costa by bringing out some of the defects in his system; but Grove's narrative was partly designed to boost by comparison the reputation of his sensitive protégé August Manns.¹¹ Grove's claim that Costa lacked Manns' ability to train up an orchestra was contradicted by most other writers: Shaw for example saw Costa (along with Manns) as 'the only chief under whose baton orchestras display good training'.¹² Davison came to admire Costa, but much of his critical writing during the 1840s aimed to advance the claims of William Sterndale Bennett. Luigi Arditi's sugary *My Reminiscences*, which praise nearly everyone, suggest that there were problems between him and Costa, who is conspicuously absent from his list of admired conductors.¹³

Later generations were heavily influenced by Shaw, for whom Costa was guilty of all the musical sins of the mid-Victorian age. New Grove perpetuates the image by stating that Shaw described Costa 'neatly' when he said that Costa 'allowed the opera to die in his grasp'.¹⁴ Nearly all memoirs of the later nineteenth-century treat him as a two-dimensional caricature, recycling the same anecdotes to show him as autocratic, unimaginative and metronomic. The influence of these later music-writers helps to explain the more favourable press for conductors like Manns and Wood, who were, as Michael Musgrave reminds us, nearer to us than Costa and his generation.¹⁵

11 Charles Graves, *The Life and Letters of Sir George Grove* (London: Macmillan, 1903), 124-5. *Shaw's Music*, vol. 2, 151.

12 *Shaw's Music*, vol. 1, 169.

13 Arditi, *My Reminiscences* (London: Skeffington, 1897), 316-7.

14 New Grove 2, vol. 6, 525.

15 Michael Musgrave, 'Changing Values in Nineteenth-Century Performance: The Work of Michael Costa and August Manns', eds Christina Bashford and Leanne Langley, *Music and British Culture, 1785-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 190.

Most contemporary Victorian sources are impregnated with discretion and euphemism. This is illustrated in the largesse with which silver testimonials were handed out. In 1836, the opera musicians gave Costa a silver plate as ‘the tribute of our thanks...In you, we have found honourable principles and gentlemanly deportment, united with the highest order of professional talent.’¹⁶ But we read that George Smart received a silver inkstand for ‘the able manner’ in which he had conducted the (indifferent) performances at the 1834 Handel celebration; and a similar presentation was made to Lumley in 1845 a year before most of his musicians deserted him.¹⁷ The many encomia for Costa need to be read against the polite clichés used about lesser conductors.

Victorian convention ensured that memoirs were usually discreet to the point of hypocrisy. Much that is controversial is never recorded. The history of the Sacred Harmonic Society by its Treasurer Robert Bowley speaks of the ‘retirement’ of its inadequate conductor Surman, who was actually dismissed after an acrimonious inquiry.¹⁸ Musical gentlemen, like those in other professions, were conventionally described as paragons of family life and probity. This is true not only of George Grove (despite his long infatuation with Edith Oldham) but also of Balfe (with his prolonged absences from his family in Paris) and Ella (with his lady friend in Victoria, London).¹⁹

What is almost wholly lacking in Costa’s case is the mundane, day-to-day material: the ‘short conversation with one of his servants’, which according to Boswell offers the key to a man’s character; or the ‘short saying or a jest’ which Plutarch believed would

¹⁶ *MW* (19 Aug. 1836), 156-7.

¹⁷ Cox, *Musical Recollections*, 1872), 86-7. Lumley, *Reminiscences*, 129.

¹⁸ Robert Bowley, *The Sacred Harmonic Society: a thirty-five year retrospect* (London: private printing, 1867), 25.

¹⁹ Graves, *George Grove* mentioned Edith Oldham only as an alumna of the Royal College of Music. Balfe’s early biographer described him as ‘Passionately attached to his family and...accustomed always to have them near him’ and as too fastidious to conduct *Rigoletto*. William Barrett, *Balfe: His Life and Works* (London: Remington, 1882), 199. On Ella see Christina Bashford, *John Ella*, 262-70.

'distinguish a person's real character more than the greatest sieges or the most important battles'.²⁰ We have almost no material on his private emotional life apart from a single hint that he was jilted by the soprano Elizabeth Seguin in the early 1830s and thereafter wanted 'never again [to] be troubled with a woman'.²¹ There are few vignettes of Costa away from the rostrum and rehearsal room. Grove described him and his brother attacking a mountain of macaroni for breakfast on Ischia in 1869; and his distress when he announced that his elderly living-in friend Captain Lyon had broken his leg and was forced to walk 'on crotchets'.²² Walter Macfarren remembered Costa, when conducting Mendelssohn in Beethoven's Piano Concerto no. 4, raising his baton in the expectation that the soloist had finished his cadenza while Mendelssohn 'gently put up his hand again and again and smilingly shook his head'.²³ The pianist Francesco Berger recalled him hosting Sunday morning receptions at Eccleston Square in 'a dressing gown, no trousers and top-boots worn over his drawers'.²⁴

Most of the standard music histories treated him as an essentially performative musician who conducted 'on a grand and imposing scale' at the festivals.²⁵ He is irrelevant to their main concerns – the search for an English Beethoven.²⁶ Henry Davey's influential

20 James Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (London: Navarre Society, 1924), vol. 1, xviii-xix.

21 The only source for this is William Spark, *Musical Memories*, 10. Elizabeth Seguin (1815-70), a lesser singer in the talented Seguin family, married a Wallachian Baron, whose early death left her destitute, with a daughter Euphrosyne Parepa, who had a distinguished operatic career as the wife of Carl Rosa. Costa attended parties at Seguin's house in the 1830s. James Robert Sterndale Bennett, *Life of William Sterndale Bennett by his Son* (Cambridge: 1909), 96.

22 Cited in Graves, *George Grove*, 123 and 178.

23 Walter Macfarren, *Memories: an Autobiography* (London: Scott, 1905), 53-4.

24 J F Barnett, *Musical Reminiscences and Impressions* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913), 82.

25 Ernest Ford, *A Short History of Music in England* (London: Sampson Low and Co., 1912).

26 On the quest for an English musical hero, see Bennett Zon, 'Histories of British Music and the Land without Music: National Identity and the Idea of the Hero' in eds, Emma Hornby and David Maw, *Essays on the History of English Music in Honour of John Caldwell: Style, Performance, Historiography* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), 311-324.

History of English Music (1895), for instance, was more interested in minor composers like Attwood, Ousley and Pearsall than a major conductor/reformer; he mentions Costa only as director of the ‘musical curiosities’ of the Handel Festivals and a man whose ‘imperturbable self-confidence’ enabled him to prosper during ‘one of the most uninteresting periods in our history’.²⁷ Ernest Walker’s *A History of Music in England* (1907) briefly restated the caricature of the musical robot who ‘in spite of his complete insensibility to deeper artistic considerations’ achieved ‘performances of a disciplined skill quite unknown before’.²⁸ John Caldwell had a perfunctory paragraph which mentioned that he raised standards of performance at the Philharmonic (without mentioning the Opera or the Sacred Harmonic Society).²⁹ Historians of the ‘Great Composers’ school largely (and rightly) omitted him, or briefly alluded to his two oratorios.

The benchmark dictionaries, with their greater esteem for composition and interpretation than for performance, illustrated the rapid eclipse of Costa’s reputation. The first edition of Grove (1879-89) for example allocated only one and a half columns to Costa, compared with four to Balfe, and nine and a half to Sterndale Bennett; the fifth edition (1954) summarised his London career in two short paragraphs. Black’s Dictionary briefly noted that Costa conducted the main London orchestras but did not mention him in its entry on Conducting.³⁰ Eaglefield-Hull had a short paragraph on ‘conductorless orchestras’, but no space for an entry on conducting, and made no

²⁷ Davey, *History of English Music* (1895), 456 and 473.

²⁸ Ernest Walker, *A History of Music in England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 261.

²⁹ John Caldwell, *Oxford History of English Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), vol. 2, 219 and 221.

³⁰ Black’s *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. de Bekker (London: Black, 1911 and 24), 133.

reference to Costa, though he included his nephew Pasquale Mario, who wrote popular tunes.³¹

1.2.3 The Press

The critics in the national and musical press call for separate consideration, not only because they are the most voluminous source but because they are also potentially the most misleading. The musical press came of age in the first half of Costa's career, with fuller musical coverage in the *Athenaeum*, *Times* and *Spectator* and new outlets in the *Musical World* (1836), *Musical Times* (1844) and the *Illustrated London News* (1843).



Figs 1.5/6. The leading critics of mid-Victorian London: J.W. Davison of the *Times* and Henry Chorley of the *Athenaeum*.

By 1850 many newspapers and magazines had music correspondents. But although the quantity of music reporting expanded prolifically, it was deficient in several respects.

First it was unduly influenced by two leading figures, James William Davison of the *Musical World* and *Times* and Henry Chorley of the *Athenaeum*. The importance of

31 A Eaglefield-Hull, *A Dictionary of Modern Music and Musicians* (London: Dent, 1924), 100 and 102.

Davison derived partly from the unique position of the *Times* and its circulation of 55,000, which exceeded all the other national papers put together. He also exercised great influence over his colleagues - Desmond Ryan of the *Standard*, George Hogarth of the *Daily News* and the *Illustrated London News*, Howard Glover and later Sutherland Edwards of the *Morning Post*. Chorley was an isolated figure but drew power from his sharp pen ('a special faculty of putting nasty remarks in very small paragraphs') and the prestige of the *Athenaeum*, which was greater than its 18,000 circulation. The *Press Directory* noted that 'Composers value only the remarks of the *Athenaeum*; and to the singer or instrumentalist its opinion is either fame or *la descente facile*'.³² These two opinionated men, more articulate and perceptive than the other critics but often erratic in their judgements, had a profound impact on subsequent historiography. This thesis has struggled – not always successfully – with the disproportionate weight of their material.

Second, several of the members of this new profession were musically unqualified and combined criticism with other duties. As non-experts writing mainly for a general audience, they took refuge in the clichés of the profession. Virtually every conductor was described at some stage as giving 'the finest performance ever seen in this country' and conducting his forces 'as if they were but one instrument'. The historian needs to guard against accepting at their face value enthusiastic reviews of performances by Sir George Smart ('nothing would be wanting when he was conducting') or Sir Henry Bishop, who were in fairness not primarily conductors.³³ In 1852, the *Musical World* recalled a time when 'the friendly eye of criticism was shut to every imperfection' at the

32 Bennett, *Forty Years*, 9. On Chorley's personality and influence, see Herman Klein, *The Reign of Patti* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1920), 81. *Newspaper Press Directory* (1845).

33 Smart quotation in Henry Phillips, *Musical and Personal Recollections* (London: C.J. Skeat, 1864), 213-4.

Philharmonic, which was regularly eulogised even in the early 1840s, when Mendelssohn was writing of its ‘death throes’.³⁴ Some critics were inept or lazy: John Ella, a lead violinist in the two main orchestras, frequently commented on the ‘foul ignorance’ of the ‘scribblers’. Gye ridiculed a detailed *Morning Herald* review of *La traviata*, which had been replaced at the last moment by *Rigoletto*.³⁵ A comparison of mid-nineteenth-century reviews with those of for example Elgar’s conducting around 1910 reveals how much more sophisticated, detached and analytical musical criticism became in the generation after Costa’s death.³⁶

Third, most critics were open to manipulation. A new profession, uncertain about their social and artistic status, ill-paid and neurotic about their respectability, they depended on the goodwill of managers for their free tickets and some were not averse to bribery. Davison was the subject of a formal complaint of bribery from Costa and Ella to the Editor of the *Times*.³⁷ Davison’s son admitted that he received ‘dinners, boxes of cigars and trinkets’, but argued that these ‘could scarcely be regarded as instruments of corruption’.³⁸ The Editor of the *Observer* confessed to Gye that his paper puffed Drury Lane ‘because [the Manager] Mapleson was so liberal in sending them boxes & stalls & they could have anything in that way they wanted!!’ Gye admitted that he gave the critics as much as they ‘could accept without appearing to be bribed’.³⁹ Such behaviour

34 *MW* (20 March 1852), 177. Mendelssohn-Paul, M.B. Foster, *History of the Philharmonic Society of London, 1813-1912* (London: John Lane, 1912), 188.

35 Ella, 7 March 1836 and 8 Feb. 1838. Gye, 15 May 1857.

36 Martin Bird, ‘A very good idea at the time: Sir Edward Elgar – Principal Conductor, London Symphony Orchestra’ in *Elgar Society Journal*, vol. 17, no. 1 (April 2011), 22-36.

37 Bennett, *Forty Years*, 54.

38 Henry Davison, *From Mendelssohn to Wagner; Being the memoirs of J.W. Davison, forty years music critic of ‘The Times’* (London: Wm Reeves, 1912), 175. For further evidence involving Meyerbeer and Samuel Sebastian Wesley, see Charles Reid, *The Music Monster; A Biography of James William Davison* (London: Quartet Books, 1984), 63 and 76-7.

39 Gye, 18 May 1872.

was a common feature of the musical world, where singers bribed conductors (to follow their tempi), the claque (to arrange for applause at the right moments) and journalists (to puff their performances). The critics responded to the flattery of those who cultivated them and were often hostile to those who (like Wagner) did not. Even the aloof Costa felt the need to invite Davison to an annual dinner.⁴⁰

Fourth, whether through bribery or personal allegiance, the musical press was highly partisan. The reader is naturally sceptical when George Hogarth praises the Philharmonic, of which he was Secretary; or when Davison describes Arabella Goddard (who was about to become Mrs Davison) as ‘the best pianist in England, if not in Europe’.⁴¹ Chorley was rightly ridiculed for criticising the singers who remained at Her Majesty’s Theatre for a year after Costa left it in 1846: ‘Singers do not lose their talent when Sir Michael Costa leaves them.’⁴² Chauvinism often distorted criticism. Hogarth’s judgement that Costa was ‘the most remarkable conductor who ever presided over an orchestra’ needs to be read in the light of his claim that English musicians like the pianist Lucy Anderson or the composer Potter stood comparison with the best on the Continent.⁴³

Partisanship inevitably showed itself in vicious personal attacks. Chorley persistently ridiculed the missionary work of John Ella’s Musical Union as the ‘Musical Ruin’; Ella responded in kind, calling Chorley ‘the missing link between the chimpanzee and the cockatoo’.⁴⁴ A protracted reading of the press and memoirs of the period suggests that

⁴⁰ Bennett, *Forty Years*, 55.

⁴¹ *MW* (26 June 1852), 402-4.

⁴² *Pall Mall Gazette* (18 Dec. 1872).

⁴³ *ILN* (8 Sept. 1849), 170.

⁴⁴ *Athenaeum* (4 Jan. 1845), 19.

music generated especially bitter rivalry, perhaps because – unlike the plastic arts which could physically co-exist – the performance of one musician’s works or skills necessarily displaced those of another. Partisanship is apparent in the ideological rifts between rival schools: between Mendelssohnians or Brahmsians and Wagnerians; between the advocates of ‘textual fidelity’ and ‘interpretative’ conducting; and between English and foreign musicians. All three themes came together in the judgement of the anti-Wagnerian *Musical World* that the Philharmonic under Wagner in 1855 was ‘much inferior in precision and general merit’ to what it had been under Costa.⁴⁵ In the last decades of the century, partisanship also took on an inter-generational flavour, as the high priests of the English Musical Renaissance extolled the achievements of their favourites by damning their predecessors.

Costa, though no ideologue, was inevitably caught up in this partisanship, which was especially apparent in the two main controversies of his career. During his long feud with Sterndale Bennett, Chorley and Charles Gruneisen predictably took Costa’s side, while Davison and his allies the other. At the height of the war of the opera houses (1846-52), there was a similar line-up. The *Morning Post* largely ceased to cover Covent Garden and strained credibility with its praises of Balfe’s orchestra. Davison’s bias in favour of Her Majesty’s was enough to prompt a rebuke from the Deputy Editor of the *Times* for a tepid review of Covent Garden’s *Le prophète*: ‘The orchestra is perfect, the *mise-en-scène* has never been surpassed...Costa is entitled to great praise for having organised so admirable a band.’⁴⁶

Finally a further deficiency, for the purposes of this thesis, is that press critics were naturally preoccupied with composers, singers or virtuosi and rarely reported on the

⁴⁵ *MW* (30 June 1855), 416.

⁴⁶ Cited in Davison, *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*, 116.

conductor or the mechanics of musical performance. The orchestra and chorus were grouped with ‘the accessories’ or ‘the inferior departments’.⁴⁷ Except for a brief period when Costa’s reforms were novel enough to attract attention – and when differences between orchestras became a major factor in the battle for survival – the critics rarely referred to conductors except in brief and stilted terms.

1.3 Methodology

For the above reasons, it is difficult to penetrate the thick veil of discretion and bias which hangs over Victorian music writing. The pitfalls are well-illustrated in the treatment of Michael Balfe, the outstanding composer of English opera in the period, but a middling conductor. In Barrett’s 1883 biography, despite numerous contemporary accounts of Balfe’s deficiencies as a conductor (Chapter 5), he is described as a conductor ‘second to none...possessing all the qualities – an eye to threaten and command, a faultless ear, ready to discover the slightest inaccuracy and above all an intelligible and decisive beat’.⁴⁸ For a recent biographer, Balfe is the conductor of high repute whom Lumley ‘headhunted’ (a euphemism for Lumley’s failure to attract anyone stronger after Costa’s resignation); a man ‘accepted by artists and musicians alike’ as a suitable replacement for Costa; and the man to whom Verdi was ‘glad’ to hand over *I masnadieri* (when a well-disposed critic wrote at the same time that Verdi left London ‘discontented with the orchestra’).⁴⁹

These source problems are a warning about the difficulties of trying to form a balanced picture on the basis of contemporary data. Costa’s reputation was distorted both by the

⁴⁷ *Morning Post* (18 Jan. 1837); Mount Edgcumbe, quoted by Thomas Love Peacock, ‘Mangled Operas and the Star System’ in ed. Halliford, *Works* (London: 1926) vol. 10, 235-50.

⁴⁸ Barrett, *Balfe*, 183.

⁴⁹ William Tyldesley, *Michael William Balfe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 132-3. Desmond Ryan, *MW* (31 July 1847), 492.

undue adulation of his contemporaries and by the excessive disparagement by the following generation (Chapter 10). Any attempt to describe the early Victorian musical scene needs to take careful account of this. It also needs to penetrate behind the psychological barrier presented by the extremes of conventionality and emotion which co-existed in Victorian society. The reader of the sources of the period is often surprised by the passion which breaks through the thick layers of self-restraint: the anger which bursts forth in Gye's diary or the tearful response of the audience to Clara Novello's singing of the National Anthem at the opening of the Crystal Palace in 1854 – with the police, contrary to standing orders, removing their helmets.⁵⁰

In addition Costa presents some special problems for a biographer. It is hard from the surviving evidence to choose between the conventional picture of a firm but fair disciplinarian and upholder of his players' best interests and the view – less often expressed but widely rumoured – that he was a power-hungry bully who exploited his control of the main musical outlets in London to force the rank-and-file to work gruelling hours for low pay. Similarly, there is the tension between his professed aim to uphold high performance standards of 'worthy' music and his resistance to much contemporary music. What did 'worthy' music mean in 1846 when he used that loaded term to the Philharmonic Directors? Was he the reformer who advanced musical performance in England or did he, as Shaw implied, abuse his dominant position to block the new repertoire and standards of authenticity?

The defective sources and Costa's introvert character combine to frustrate the goal of biography – to glue together patchy, non-contiguous data into a credible narrative. There is also the biographer's occupational risk of prioritising one individual – what Victoria Glendenning called 'the spotlight effect'. This is particularly the case when trying to

⁵⁰ *Times* (12 June 1854).

reassess the neglected figures of the mid-nineteenth-century. Mr Pooter, whom Costa may resemble in some respects, can too easily become the hero of the story.

There is one further methodological challenge: the need to address the notion of the Great Man. Victorian ideas about biography shaped how public figures were seen. Great men (they are nearly always men) were judged by how far they met the Carlylean test of greatness: ‘these great ones: the modellers, patterns and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of people contrived to do or attain’.⁵¹ This intellectual framework presents special problems in the case of music. Carlyle, along with Ruskin and Arnold, was more interested in heroic poets and painters than musicians. He recognised that the musical sense of ‘lilt’ was an important ingredient in the poetry of ‘the melodious priest’ Dante, but music itself did not have a place in his concept of the ‘mysterious Force’ and ‘infinitude’. Carlyle’s notions were later absorbed into the aesthetic of the Sublime in music and adapted to embrace the creative musician – of which Beethoven became the prime exemplar. The idea of ‘the man of genius’ thus came to be associated in music-writing with innovative composers, which in turn fostered what Ralph Locke has termed ‘the Tyranny of the Masterpiece’.⁵² There was no place in this framework for conductors, until the personality cults surrounding Richter and von Bülow allowed them (and later others) to join the constellation of Great Men on the strength of their ability to reinterpret the music of other Great Men. This conceptual framework inevitably influenced the hierarchy of musical achievement in which someone like Costa was assessed, especially after his death (Chapter 10).

⁵¹ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-worship and the Heroic in History* (London: James Frazer, 1841), 1.

⁵² Ralph Locke, ‘Nineteenth-century music: quantity, quality and qualities’ in *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), vol. 1, 3-41.

Because of these methodological issues, I have given more weight to a thematic rather than a biographical approach. This has the disadvantage that the material has to be taken out of chronological order, thus losing the sense of the unfolding of the subject's life and tying him to themes of which he was perhaps not conscious. But this approach is, I believe, more suited to the subject of the thesis, since Costa's significance in English music was not as a creative musician (who evolved artistically throughout his career) but as a conductor-manager (whose system was fully developed by 1850). The structures and systems which he brought to the music industry are more important than the details of his origins, habits and hobbies. A good deal of biographical detail is thus deliberately omitted. But I hope that what is lost in terms of the unfolding of an autonomous life is gained in terms of relating his achievements to his context and contemporaries.

The structure of this thesis therefore focusses on the four main elements of Costa's career.

First, the creation of a model, new to London, of professional conducting, backed by Costa's contractual powers and his uncompromising personality. Chapter 3 analyses the arrangements for orchestral control in 1830. The following chapters describe his reforms (Chapter 4) and seek to assess his success as a conductor (Chapter 5).

Second, the impact of his system on the renaissance of the King's Theatre and the creation in 1847 of its rival at Covent Garden (Chapter 6); and his partnership with Frederick Gye, which shaped the first two decades of Covent Garden as an opera house (Chapter 7).

Third, his effort to apply his model in the concert hall, especially the Philharmonic, and to show that he could conduct the German orchestral 'classics' (Chapter 8.1 to 8.5).

Fourth, his take-over of the leading Victorian choral societies, reforming the Sacred Harmonic Society and galvanising the principal festivals (Chapter 8.6 and 8.7).

Interwoven with these phases of his career were Costa's efforts to be accepted as a composer; his attitude to the new aesthetic theories about conducting and the status of musical 'works'; and his conservative response to rapidly changing fashions of style and repertoire (Chapter 9). His ultimate failure to find a lasting place for his own works in the repertoire and to keep pace with late-Romantic aesthetics go a long way to explain the surprisingly rapid reversal of his reputation at the end of his unprecedentedly long career (Chapter 10).

Before considering these themes of Costa's life, it is necessary to examine the main formative influences and personality of this strange and complex man. That is the subject of Chapter 2.

Chapter 2: Formative Influences and Personality

Although biographical information may not provide the master key to the secrets of a musician's creativity, some attempt must be made to identify and explain Costa's unusual personality, which was central to his achievement as a conductor-manager. His hallmark as a conductor – his total authority over his musicians – rested primarily on his commanding personality: what the *Musical Times* called his 'secret of command'.¹ It was this which enabled an immigrant, from a city with a weak tradition of orchestral performance, to systematise and impose such far-reaching orchestral reforms. The *Times* obituary commented that other conductors with the same musical skills could not 'govern in like manner' because they lacked his 'personal ascendancy'.² The conductor Frederick Cowen wrote that 'Sir Michael ruled everyone with a rod, or rather a baton, of iron'.³ Klein described him as 'perhaps the severest martinet who ever wielded a baton'.⁴ All commentators touched on this theme, taking it positively or negatively



Fig. 2.1. 'He Will Have His Way'. Cartoon in *The Entr'Acte* (25 February 1882).

¹ *Musical Times*, (1 June 1884), 321-3.

² *Times* obituary (30 April 1884).

³ Frederic Cowen, *My Art and My Friends* (London: Edward Arnold, 1913), 47.

⁴ Herman Klein, *Thirty Years of Musical Life in London* (London: Heinemann, 1903), 54.

according to their perspective. A fierce caricature of him in the magazine *Entr'acte* carried the caption: 'He will have his way' (Fig. 2.1).

One illustration of the limited biographical material about Costa is that even his place and date of birth are not known for certain. The *Enciclopedia Italiana* and New Grove 2 state that he was born in 1808, but by the end of his life 1810 seem to have been the accepted date.⁵ He is variously described as being born in Geneva or Naples, but it is certain that he lived in Naples from a very early age. There are however several reference points on which a theory of his personality can be constructed. There is the caricature formed by those who observed him from outside; the different picture of the private man from his close friends; and a couple of letters which reveal his very close attachment to his brother Raphael. But more significantly, there were four influences that can credibly be assumed to have had a formative effect on his personality: his Neapolitan background, his traumatic introduction to English musical life in Birmingham, his stressful initiation into the Italian Opera in London, and his ambivalent status as an outsider in English society.

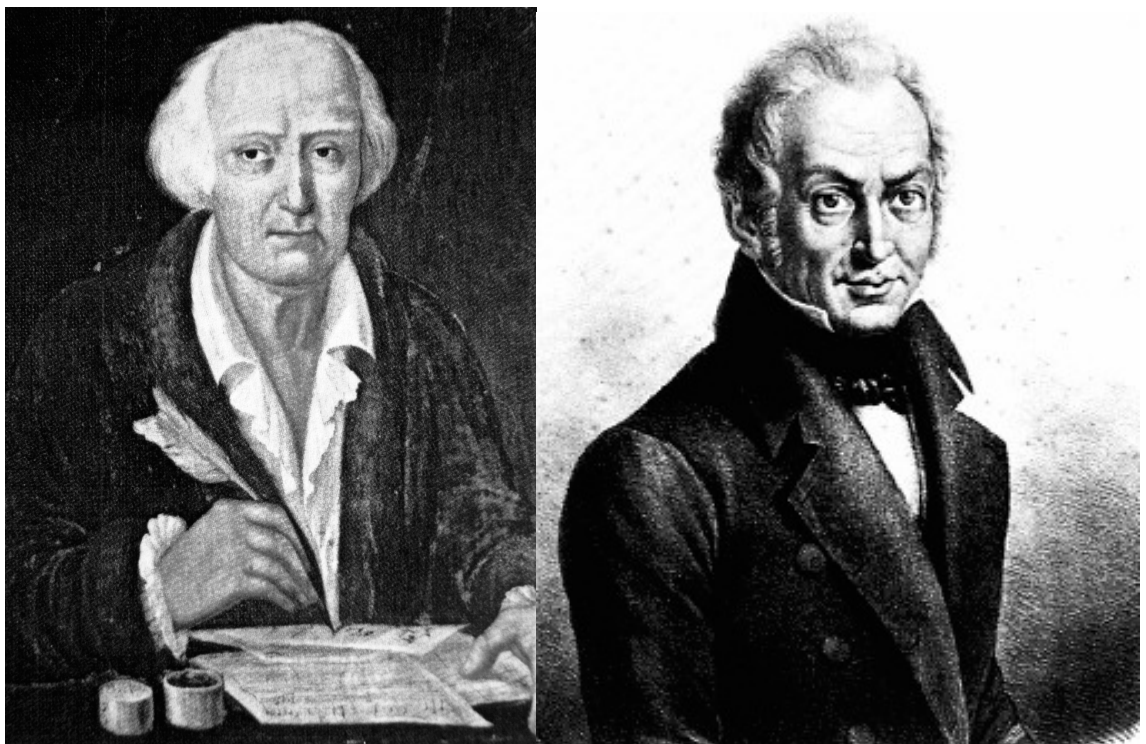
2.1 Naples

The Naples where Michele Andrea Agnelli Costa grew up was by far the biggest city in Italy, with a population of about half a million, more than twice the size of Milan. It was the first city in Italy to have an iron suspension bridge and a railway, but it also had the biggest slums in Europe. Politically, it was the setting of violent feuds between urban brigands loosely allied to the establishment (the *lazzaroni*) and radical secret societies drawn mainly from the intelligentsia and commercial classes (the *carbonari*). The rule

⁵ The *Morning Post* celebrated his 74th birthday on 4 Feb. 1884. This squares with all the obituaries and with the 1871 census, which stated that he was then 60.

of King Ferdinand and his Austrian wife became increasingly reactionary after two expulsions and the execution of her sister, Marie Antoinette.

Costa's father's family came originally from the Sephardic Jewish community. There is no evidence about whether they were expelled from Spain in 1492 or converted to avoid expulsion. But by the time of Costa's birth, his family were assimilated Catholics. His father, Pasquale Costa, was a minor church composer, whose title of 'cavaliere' probably indicated family aspiration rather than aristocratic status. His maternal grandfather, Giacomo Tritto (Fig. 2.2), was a leading opera composer who later became the Director of the Naples Conservatory. It was from Giacomo that Costa received his early musical education. An uncle, Domenico Tritto, was a composer and *maestro di capella* at two major churches in Naples. With such a background, it was natural for him to be enrolled in the prestigious Royal Academy of Music.



Figs 2.2/3 Giacomo Tritto (1733-1824) Costa's maternal grand-father and Niccolo Zingarelli (1752-1837) his principal teacher.

Naples gave Costa an excellent musical education: he was tutored by the prominent

conservative composer Nicolo Zingarelli (Fig. 2.3) and studied singing under the celebrated Girolamo Crescentini.⁶ Costa later urged the Royal Society for the Arts to adopt the regime of the Naples Academy, where pupils from 13 to 21 studied music and the other arts as part of a rounded education.⁷ In Naples, he was in touch with distinguished musical company: Paisiello (1813-6), Rossini (1815-1822), Bellini (1819-27) and later Donizetti were there – as were leading singers who were to play a major part in his London career: Luigi Lablache, Antonio Tamburini and Fanny Persiani (Figs 6.2/7). He also had the opportunity to promote his early compositions, notably his opera *La Malvina*, commissioned in early 1829 for the Teatro San Carlo, where Costa worked briefly as *maestro al cembalo*.

By the time of his visit to Birmingham in 1829, Costa was launched on a promising career in Naples, under the patronage of Zingarelli. But his grandfather Tritto died in 1824 and, after the death of his mother, his father remarried in 1826. Although he returned occasionally to Naples, there is no evidence of any connection with his step-mother and half-siblings. It may be significant that, by 1841, Costa was joined in London by his father and his younger brother Raphael, both of whom were buried with Costa in Kensal Green cemetery. This suggests that Costa's family connections were increasingly concentrated in London. It is reasonable to assume that he was profoundly affected by the separation from his family, especially given the loneliness and humiliation which he experienced during his early years in the alien environment of England.

2.2 Birmingham

⁶ Zingarelli (1752-1837) was from 1814 Director of the Naples Conservatoire. He composed 37 operas. His *Giulietta e Romeo* (Shakespeare with a happy ending) was produced at the King's Theatre. For more see New Grove 2, vol. 27, 844-5.

⁷ Costa's evidence to the Royal Society of Arts, 16 February 1866, *Journal of the Society of Arts* (1866), 214-6.

Costa's conventional career path in the opera houses and churches of Naples took an unexpected turn in 1829, when Zingarelli sent him to England to supervise the performance of a cantata commissioned by the Birmingham Festival. The trip was seen by the old man as a career opportunity for his protégé. It proved to be a traumatic experience.

Costa expected to oversee the performance of Zingarelli's cantata, parts of which he had scored.⁸ But the moving spirits of the Festival deemed that the 19-year-old Costa was too young for this [role](#) and offered to pay his expenses only if he performed as a tenor in four concerts. The reviews were scathing. One commented that 'The singer was little, if at all, better than the composition.' Another stated that Costa should return immediately since he did not add anything to the over-supply of foreign musicians in England. It was observed that '...*Questo Signor costa troppo*'.⁹ *The Harmonicon* commented on one aria, 'Nel furor delle tempeste' from Bellini's *Il pirata*: 'Had he remained but a few moments longer on the stage, he would have witnessed a storm compared to which the roarings of his own Vesuvius would have seemed but a murmur'. Zingarelli 'would have acted with more discretion had he kept both his sacred song and his profane singer for the benefit of his Neapolitan friends'. Costa's singing was 'below mediocrity...he does not compensate for his vocal deficiencies by his personal address, which is abundantly awkward'.¹⁰

After this disastrous experience, Costa planned to return quickly to Naples. But he was sternly advised by Zingarelli not to miss 'a chance which, once lost, never returns'.¹¹ It

⁸ Cox, *Musical Recollections*, vol.1, 178.

⁹ 'This gentleman costs too much', quoted in *Musical Times* (1 Nov. 1906), 743-4.

¹⁰ Details in *Harmonicon*, vol. VII. no. 4 (April 1829), 91-2. *Harmonicon*, vol. VII, no. 11 (1829), 274.

¹¹ Zingarelli-Costa (9 Sept. 1829), *Musical Times* (1 Nov. 1906), 743-4.

is not clear whether politics played a part in Costa's decision to stay. He may have wanted to escape from the oppressive and unstable political climate of Naples, where Donizetti and Bellini encountered heavy censorship. The evidence, though slender, suggests that he was less politically minded than the tenors Mario and Rubini, who often struck pro-Republican postures on stage. But he seems to have shared the pro-Garibaldi sentiment of most of the Italians in London. He played a full part during the celebrations to honour Garibaldi's visit to London in 1864. The *Musical World* commented that he was 'no prophet...in his own country, nor any great pet of King Bombas' (the illiberal Ferdinand II).¹²

One consideration for staying in London may have been the difficulty of securing a good post in Naples, where Pacini, Donizetti and Bellini were already established and there was a surfeit of local composers, including several Costas and Trittos. From a practical angle, he may have needed to find at least short-term employment in London to restore his finances. Whatever its drawbacks as a musical centre, London promised much higher financial rewards than Naples, where the San Carlo orchestra was in decline and the opera itself, according to Donizetti, 'a cage of madmen'.¹³ London had a powerful Neapolitan community that included Rubini, the leading soprano Giuditta Pasta, the Vestris family who ran Covent Garden and the influential composer Muzio Clementi, who had been impressed by Costa's skilful re-scoring of 'Nel furor delle tempeste' at Birmingham. These connections put Costa in touch with the new manager of the Italian Opera at the King's Theatre, the French actor Pierre-François Laporte, who offered him the subordinate post of *maestro al cembalo*, probably in late 1829.

2.3 Early years at the Italian Opera

¹² *MW* (27 Jan. 1855), 56.

¹³ Donizetti-Ricordi (3 May 1835), G. Zavadini, *Donizetti: Vita - Musiche - Epistolario* (Bergamo: 1948), no. 164.

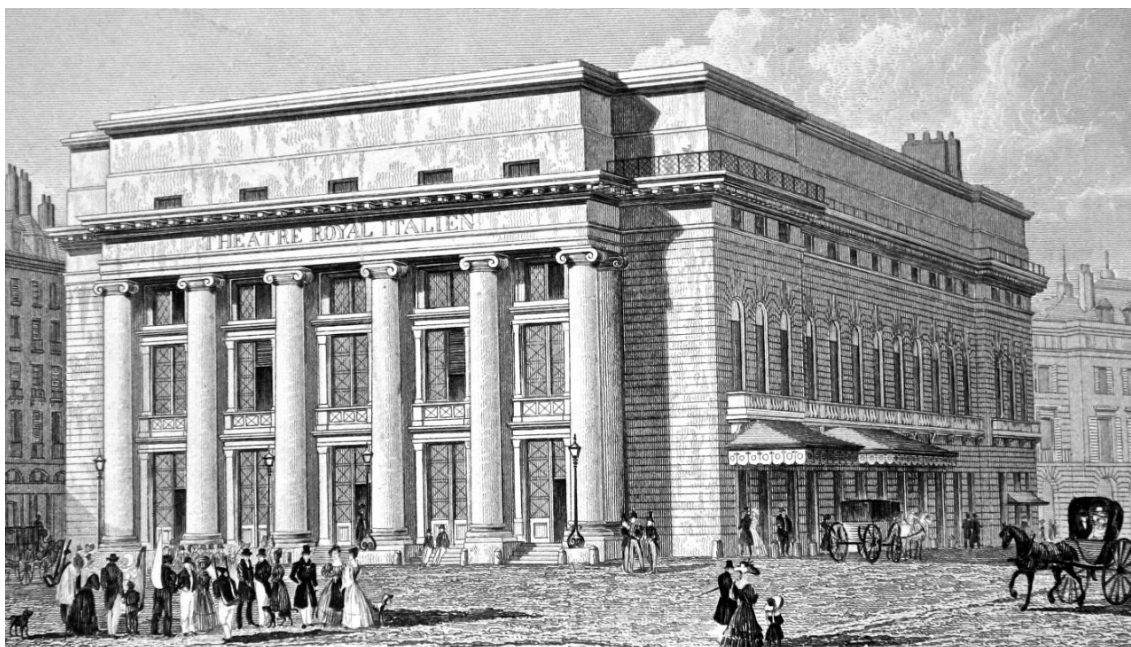


Fig. 2.4 The Italian Opera at the King's Theatre - from 1837 Her Majesty's Theatre.

Costa's first five years at the King's Theatre (Fig. 2.4) were marked by financial instability, maladministration and bitter power struggles. Laporte, inherited a 20 per cent deficit and litigation worthy of *Bleak House*. His predecessor, John Ebers, claimed to have lost £38,000 in seven years. Laporte at one stage had to manage his theatre from debtor's prison.¹⁴ Costa was subordinated to two powerful personalities. The leader, Paolo



Fig. 2.5 Nicholas Bochsa (1789-1856).

Spagnoletti, had dominated the orchestra since 1814. The 'Director of the Opera and Stage Manager' was the energetic French harpist Nicholas Bochsa (Fig. 2.5).

¹⁴ Chorley, *Musical Recollections*, 121. The details are unreliable but Laporte's losses were put at over £30,000 by Cox, (*Musical Recollections*, vol. 1, 271) and £19,000 by the *Times* (1 Sept. 1836).

Bochsa persuaded Laporte that he could cut orchestral costs by publishing stringent new Regulations, which prompted sixteen leading players to resign and publish their grievances.¹⁵ These two documents sum up the situation that Costa inherited. Laporte and Bochsa wanted to engage the orchestra for 50 nights a season instead of 60, paying only half-rates for additional performances and nothing for rehearsals and benefits. They also tried to stop the musicians from playing elsewhere (except for the Ancient Concerts and Philharmonic) and from sending deputies in their place.¹⁶ This stricter regime was similar to the one that Costa would impose over the next five years. But Laporte was ‘subject...to periods of despondency and depression’ and ‘deficient in the art of enforcing discipline and of maintaining order’.¹⁷ The embryonic music press took the side of the disaffected English players, who were rightly seen as vulnerable and underpaid.¹⁸ Laporte replaced some of the striking players with musicians imported from Paris and Brussels, but had to manage with only 16 strings of whom only six were declared competent.¹⁹

As a result, the King’s Theatre orchestra, which had rarely been mentioned in reviews, became a focus of criticism. It was judged ‘vastly inferior to what it had been...This has proceeded no doubt from the salaries of the instrumental performers having been so much reduced.’²⁰ *The Harmonicon* described it as a ‘broken up orchestra’, performing

15 The Regulations are in Rachel Cowgill and Gabriella Dideriksen, *The Opera orchestra in 18th and 19th century Europe* (Berlin: BWV, 2008), vol. 1, Annex C. ‘An Explanation of the Differences existing between the Manager of the Italian Opera and the non-conforming Members of the late Orchestra’ is in *Harmonicon*, vol. VII, no. 2 (Feb. 1829), 35 and summarised in the *Times* (24 and 26 Jan. 1829).

16 For fuller details see Cowgill and Dideriksen, ‘The Opera orchestra’, vol. 1, 277.

17 Lumley, *Reminiscences*, 7-9.

18 For the plight of the lesser musicians, see passim A.V. Beedell, *The Decline of the English Musician 1788-1888* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Rohr, *Careers of British Musicians 1750-1850*; and Ehrlich, *Music Profession*.

19 *Harmonicon*, vol. VII, no. 3 (March 1829), 70 and vol. VII, no. 6 (June 1829), 145.

20 W.T. Parke, *Musical Memoirs* (London: 1830), vol. 2, 270.

in a way which would produce ‘an outcry in a barn’.²¹ ‘We never before heard so many blunders and so much bad playing as in this theatre’. In *Don Giovanni*, ‘the few superior players in it do more harm than good – they expose the faults of the majority’.²² The Times wrote that the production of *La cenerentola* was ‘hardly well enough for a company of strolling players’, a ‘stigma’ on the management and an ‘utter affront’ to the audience.²³ In Costa’s second year, the orchestra was still ‘reduced in numbers, deficient in rehearsals’. The company exhibited ‘scenes of confusion...unparalleled in the annals of the King’s Theatre’.²⁴ Laporte was accused of relying on a handful of stars (Fig. 6/8) but of being ‘indifferent how the subordinate parts were filled, whether in opera, ballet or band’.²⁵



Figs 2.6/8 Three divas from Costa’s early years at the King’s Theatre: Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient, Maria Malibran and Henriette Sontag.

These three features – a financial-legal imbroglio, truculent underpaid musicians and administrative ineptitude – marked Costa’s formative years at the King’s Theatre. The orchestra, which routinely misbehaved with new arrivals, made a dig at his youth by

²¹ *Harmonicon*, vol. VII, no. 4 (April 1829), 97.

²² *Harmonicon*, vol. VII, no. 3 (March 1829), 70 and (June 1829), 145.

²³ *Times* (22 Feb. 1830).

²⁴ *Harmonicon*, vol. IX, no. 1 (Jan. 1831), 1.

²⁵ *Athenaeum* (23 Feb. 1833), 124.

presenting him, at his first rehearsal, with a case containing seven miniature razors, for use when he was old enough to shave. The *Times* took him to task for some additions to Mercadante's *Donna Caritca*, which merely added to the tedious length of the original.²⁶ In 1831, he was blamed for making the only 'blot' in an otherwise excellent Philharmonic concert: a 'wretched' Fantasia for horn distinguished only by its difficulty of execution. 'We don't know who Costa is and we hope nobody will tell us.'²⁷ Later that year, his first ballet score, *Kenilworth*, was dismissed as undistinguished.²⁸

There is very little information about Costa's early struggles, partly because the 'conductor' received virtually no attention from the critics. But he gradually superseded the unpopular Bochsa. Laporte's 1829 prospectus had announced 'The whole of the opera under Mons Bochsa' and the *Times* complained that he had 'succeeded again in thrusting himself into the stage-management of this house'.²⁹ But Bochsa ceased to be named as 'conductor' at the opera concerts in May 1829. His withdrawal from orchestral responsibilities was probably a pre-condition for the return of the dissident musicians early in 1830.³⁰ Costa was billed as 'conductor' of the series of Paganini concerts at the Kings concert room from 3 June 1831, though he attracted attention only for supporting Paganini as he fainted before a barrage of applause that 'completely drowned the full orchestra'.³¹ Costa appears at the back of a group of King's Theatre players in a lithograph marking the arrival of 'The Modern Orpheus' (Fig. 2.10).

Significantly, as Costa's obituary in the *Musical Times* observed, neither Costa's

²⁶ *Times* (27 July 1830).

²⁷ *Athenaeum* (30 April 1831), 284.

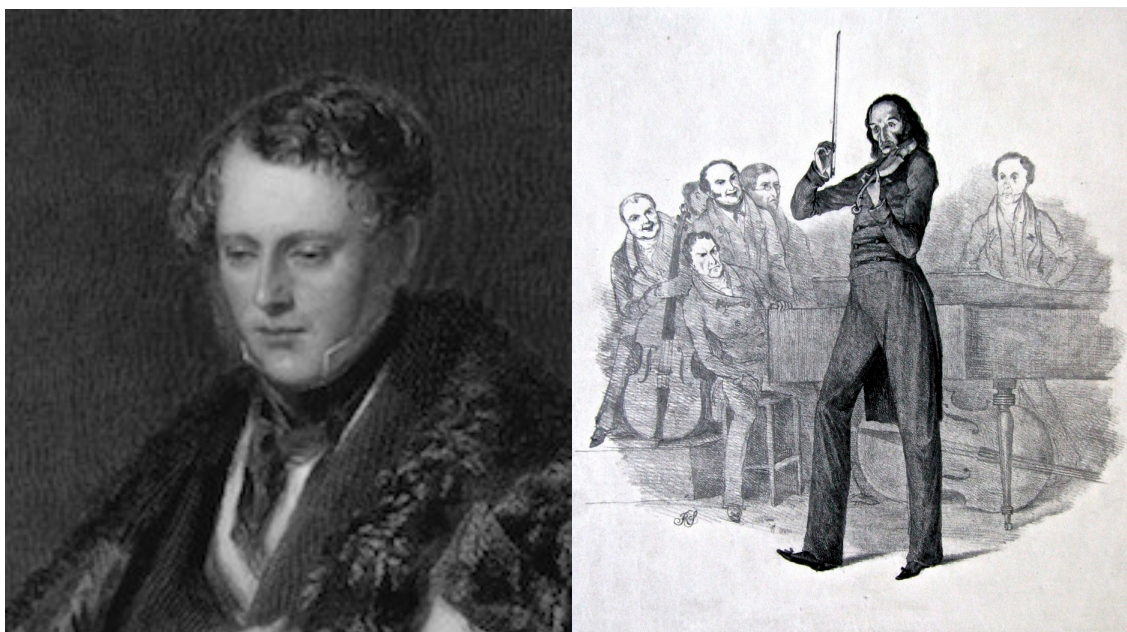
²⁸ *Times* (7 March 1831).

²⁹ Prospectus of 28 Jan. 1829 and *Times* (18 March 1829).

³⁰ *Harmonicon* (March 1830), 134.

³¹ *Times* (6 April and 5 Aug. 1831).

appointment nor Bochsa's replacement were thought worthy of mention in the musical press.³²



Figs 2.9/10 Monck Mason (1803-89), manager of the King's Theatre in 1832, and Paganini who performed concerts there, with Costa (shown faintly at the back) as 'conductor'.

At the end of the 1831 season, Laporte went off to manage a theatre season at Covent Garden, having been outbid for the King's Theatre by a 28-year-old dilettante called Monck Mason (Fig. 2.9). 1832 was an inauspicious year, with riots over the Reform Bill, an outbreak of cholera and an unmusical new court under William IV. Mason put on an ambitious repertoire, without the resources to sustain it, and met with savage condemnation from the critics. A disastrous *Il barbiere di Siviglia* was hissed. Vaccai's *Giulietta e Romeo*, 'directed' by the composer, was 'shamefully turned out'.³³ Mason secured the rights to Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* but was pre-empted by three pirate productions. The first night started an hour late and dragged on until 1.40 in the morning. The lead soprano, Cinti-Damoreau, quit over a pay dispute three days later.³⁴

³² *Musical Times* (1 June 1884), 320-1.

³³ *Athenaeum* (14 April 1832), 244.

³⁴ *Athenaeum* (23 June 1832), 404.

Meyerbeer told his wife that ‘Mason’s sloppy management tries my patience to its limits 20 times a day’.³⁵ The season degenerated into a series of last-minute cancellations and substitutions. A letter in the *Times*, complaining of unfulfilled promises, carried an Editor’s note that he had received twenty similar letters of complaint.³⁶ By October, Mason was in the Court of Bankruptcy and Laporte limped back from a failed season at Covent Garden.³⁷

Unprofitable and chaotic though it was, Mason’s year at the King’s Theatre was important in several respects. He combined six premieres with a seminal season of German opera (see Chapter 4).³⁸ Costa had become Musical Director and was able to increase the orchestra from about 50 to 56 players.³⁹ Looking back thirty years later, the Henry Chorley dated the renaissance of the opera to 1832, ‘the year when (happy event for England) the Italian orchestra was placed under the direction of Signor Costa...’⁴⁰

But Chorley had clearly overlooked the realities of Costa’s position in 1832 and how savagely his predecessor at the *Athenaeum* had criticised the King’s Theatre musicians: ‘The inaccuracies of the singers in the concerted passages would have disgraced Sadler’s Wells; and the accompaniment of the horns and trombones in the Invocation and the chorus singing were bad enough to deserve special mention’.⁴¹ Costa was still

35 Meyerbeer-wife (4 May 1832), Heinz and Gudrun Becker, Giacomo Meyerbeer, *A Life in Letters*, tr. *Violette* (London: Helm, 1983), 50.

36 *Times* (2 June 1832).

37 Mason’s net loss was £11,300. ‘Continental Opera in the London of William IV: Thomas Monck Mason and the King’s Theatre, Haymarket, 1832’, unpublished paper delivered at the Fifth Conference on Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain at the University of Nottingham (2005) by Kristan Tetens.

38 Donizetti’s *L’esule di Roma* and *Olivio e Pasquale*, Vaccai’s *Giulietta e Romeo*, Paccini’s *Gli Arabi nelle Gallie*, Bellini’s *La straniera* and (in French) Meyerbeer’s *Robert le diable*.

39 Cowgill and Dideriksen, ‘Opera orchestras in Georgian and early Victorian London’, 295-6.

40 Chorley, *Musical Recollections*, 34.

41 *Athenaeum* (31 March 1832), 212.

not mentioned on the playbills, even when his own ballet scores were being performed. A playbill which announced *Der Freischütz* and Costa's ballet *Une heure a Naples*, named the 'Maitre de Chappelle' Chélar, 'Chorus trainer' Roeckel, 'Leader of the Band' (Spagnoletti) and the Stage Managers (Broad et Derossi) but not Costa.⁴² When Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* was premiered, it was entrusted not to him but to a visiting French conductor, Tulou.⁴³ In Rossini's *Pietro l'eremita* (*Mosè in Egitto* minus biblical references), 'so imperfect a performance reflects a disgrace on Il Maestro, whoever he may be'.⁴⁴ Mason was advised to bring Habeneck from Paris or Guhr from Frankfurt 'to give us an idea of a conductor's duties'.⁴⁵ Cox recalled that 1832 was 'one of the greatest operatic fiascos that was ever made in this country'.⁴⁶

The singing and playing of the Italian Opera continued to attract harsh criticism during 1833. In Rossini's *Tancredi*, the chorus badly needed 'a proper drill-sergeant' and the band sounded 'dreadfully weak'. A performance of *Norma*, with Pasta, was 'little better than a rehearsal with the chorus and band'.⁴⁷ The musicians were still disgruntled: a performance of *Le nozze di Figaro* was blighted when the chorus refused to appear because they had not been paid. Programming remained chaotic, starting at any time from 7 to 8.30. In April, some of the Italian stars did not arrive from Paris in time to perform *L'Italiana in Algeri*, so a German troupe was hurriedly put on in *Fidelio*, which

⁴² Playbill at the National Museum of the Performing Arts, London. Also *Morning Post* (9 March 1832).

⁴³ *Athenaeum* (16 June 1832), 388.

⁴⁴ *Athenaeum* (18 Feb. 1832), 116.

⁴⁵ *Athenaeum* (17 March 1832), 180.

⁴⁶ Cox, *Musical Recollections*, vol. 1, 233 and 271.

⁴⁷ *Athenaeum* (25 May 1833), 332, and (29 June 1833), 420.

Hummel conducted ‘with spirit and precision’.⁴⁸ There was uproar when Bellini’s *Il pirata* was replaced by *Fidelio*, allegedly because of influenza.

It was not until 1837 that the orchestra began to attract consistently favourable mention and the chorus had to wait until 1838 (Chapter 3). It is therefore plausible to see Costa’s first five years at the King’s as a harsh formative influence. It is not hard to imagine how far the derisive behaviour of the orchestra and Laporte’s chaotic programming contributed to Costa’s obsession with order and authority. Moreover, he appears to have overstretched himself. In addition to a heavy burden at the King’s Theatre, he was composing songs and ballets (Chapter 9) and giving lessons to pupils, who were billed as performing in the Royal Academy of Music concerts.⁴⁹ He was juggling an increasing number of private concerts, leaving some early in order to attend others.⁵⁰

It was during those initial years, when he enjoyed neither success nor status, that he encountered the predicament of the outsider in English society.

2.4 The Outsider

The period around the 1832 Reform Act saw an intense debate about English identity.⁵¹ In this somewhat neurotic atmosphere, foreign musicians occupied a doubly uncertain position. As foreigners, they were in varying degrees part of the ‘Other’, against which the English measured their own identity. As musicians they were in a profession associated with emotion, display and effeminacy – all contrary to the emerging self-image of English restraint, decorum and manliness. A *Punch* cartoon underlined the link

⁴⁸ *Athenaeum* (30 March 1833), 204 and (13 April 1833), 235.

⁴⁹ Concert programmes at RAM, 205.572 and 573.

⁵⁰ *Morning Post* (3 May 1840 and 18 May 1841).

⁵¹ On the issues of English identity see Mandler, *The English National Character* (Yale: Yale University Press 2006) and Pallua, Ulrich, *Eurocentrism, Racism, Colonialism in the Victorian and Edwardian Age* (Heidelberg: 2005).

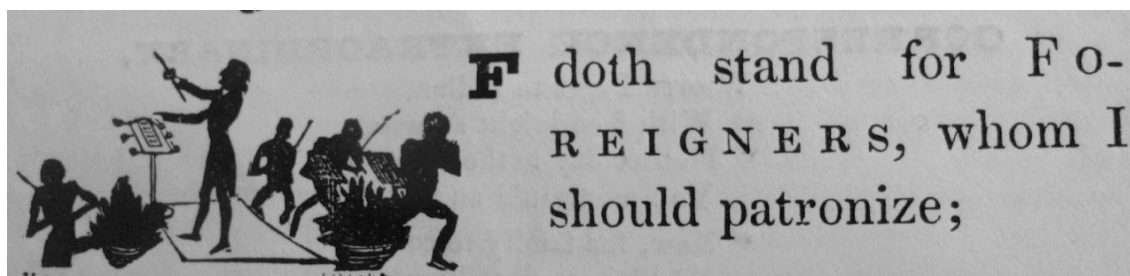


Fig. 2.11 'Foreigners' depicted as musicians in *Punch* alphabet (21 Aug. 1841, 62).

between foreigners and musicians who should be patronised (Fig. 2.11).⁵² Regarded as artisans – or at best as professionals – foreign musicians had to seek a respectable position in the complex hierarchies of the middle classes.⁵³ Costa's experience at Birmingham in 1829 will have alerted him to the xenophobic currents flowing in England. He was potentially on the wrong side of several important divides – as a Jew, a Catholic, a southern Italian and a musician. He thus occupied a classic liminal position, on the outer fringes of social and moral respectability.

It is not clear whether Costa was considered – or considered himself – a Jew. By the early nineteenth-century his family were Catholic and a respectable part of the Naples musical establishment. In London, however, where Costa was a well-known Jewish name, he would have been assumed to be Jewish.⁵⁴ This was certainly not a barrier to talented musicians: Giudita Pasta, Malibran, Lumley and Moscheles all enjoyed success in London; Meyerbeer and especially Mendelssohn were on the road to canonisation. But, although the campaign for civic rights for Jews was about to bear fruit, with the appointment of David Salomons as the first Jewish Lord Mayor (1855), social prejudice was still widespread. The 'Jew Bill' of 1836 failed to provide Jews with all the rights available to Catholics. Anti-semitic prejudice may have been a factor in the decisions of

⁵² *Punch* (21 Aug. 1841), 62. Cited by Holly Mathieson, 'Embodying Music: The Visuality of Three Iconic Conductors in London, 1840-1940', MusB thesis (Otago), 116-125.

⁵³ Mandler, *English National Character*, 53. Pallua, *Eurocentrism, Racism, Colonialism*, 20.

⁵⁴ Emanuel Mendes da Costa had been secretary of the Royal Society; and his brother Solomon had presented British Museum with the nucleus of its Hebrew collection.

the Philharmonic Society to blackball Costa and Moscheles in 1838. Writers like Dickens and George Eliot were still fostering the anti-semitic caricatures that they would later correct.⁵⁵ Gye records Lord Ward, the proprietor of Her Majesty's, as referring to Lumley as 'a bloody Jew'.⁵⁶

As a Christian, Costa was spared the dilemma that led an estimated 50,000 Jews in England, including his friend the pianist Julius Benedict, to convert prior to 1875.⁵⁷ Unlike prominent practising Jews such as the Rothschilds, he appears to have distanced himself from Jewish society, organising his social life round the musical and Masonic worlds. Among the many unpleasant things said about Costa during his career, I have come across only one possible allusion to Jewishness: Mapleson refers to Costa, like Shylock, insisting on his bond.⁵⁸ Costa presented himself as a member of 'an old Spanish family'.⁵⁹ Grove's story about Costa finding Mendelssohn, Moscheles and Meyerbeer together at Her Majesty's and asking: 'What are these old Jews about?' suggests either that he was relaxed enough to joke about Jewishness or that he saw them as distinctly more Jewish than himself.⁶⁰

His southern Italian background was in some ways a more serious barrier to acceptance in English society, since (unlike his Jewishness) it could not be disowned. While his

55 The harsh references to Fagin in *Oliver Twist* (1838) were not softened until the revised edition of 1867, by which time Dickens had created the 'gentle Jew' Riah in *Our Mutual Friend* (1864). George Eliot wrote many anti-semitic comments before making a Jew the most admirable character in *Daniel Deronda* (1876).

56 Gye, 29 July 1857.

57 De Le Roi, *Die Evangelische Christenheit und die Juden*, vol. 3, 60.

58 *The Mapleson Memoirs*, ed. Harold Rosenthal (New York: Appleton-Century, 1966), 138.

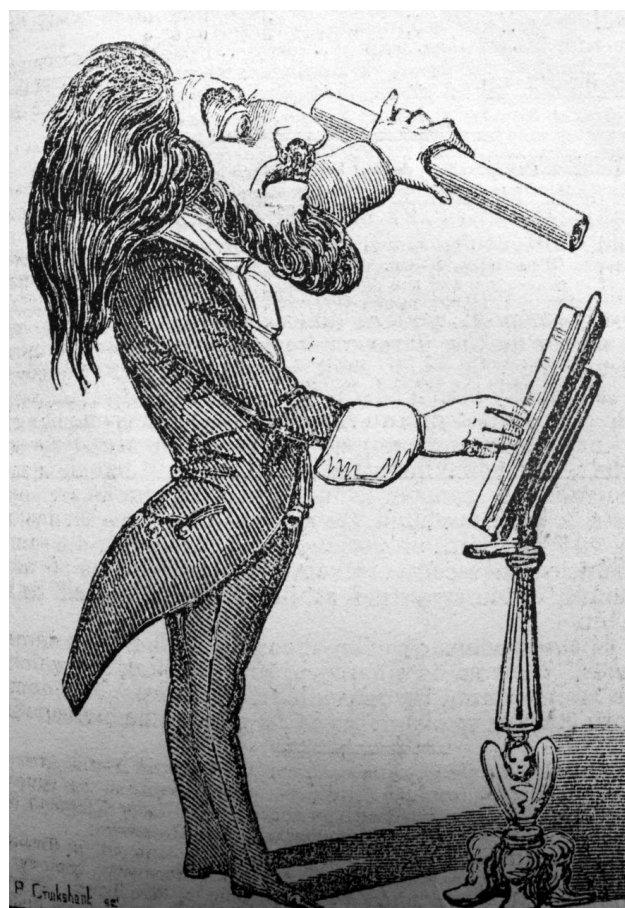
59 *Times* (30 April 1884).

60 Grove, cited in Graves, *George Grove*, 124.

finances were fragile, he risked being linked to the underclass of 2,000 Italians working in poorly paid niche jobs in London. Even in music, there was a prejudice that was to remain deep-rooted up to Toscanini's day, that Italians could not conduct orchestral music and came to London only to rob the English of jobs and money (Fig. 2.12).⁶¹

It was harder for Italians than, for example, Germans to be accepted as English. On the other hand they enjoyed some professional advantages. It was an asset in the opera house that Costa could

manage the fractious Italian singers, act as the link to major composers abroad (especially Rossini) and adapt works from Paris and Germany for the Italian Opera. More generally, his Italian Conservatoire training gave him a distinct advantage over English musicians, especially in the eyes of the xenophiliac opera subscribers.⁶²



SIGNOR HAYDINI MOZARTI CRIBBINI.

Ah! great conductor, what a mighty fuss,
What strange ferocity to wheedle us;
Who would imagine from that brigand look,
That music spoil'd perhaps a decent cook.
Oh! antic muse, who made such men as these,
To finger all our cash, with their false keys;
They rush in shoals their trump'ry notes to play,
And in return, take our bank notes away.

Fig. 2.12 A caricature Italian conductor (*ILN*, 30 Dec. 1843, 430).

⁶¹ As late as 1889, Shaw pronounced that symphonic music was not Arditi's department because 'his temperament is so Italian'. *Shaw's Music*, vol. I, 735-6.

⁶² Nicholas Temperley, 'Xenophilia in British Musical History' in ed. Bennett Zon, *Nineteenth-Century British Musical Studies* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), vol 1, 3-19.

2.5 Costa's Quest for Acceptance

One of the intriguing aspects of Costa's career is that he did not follow the route opened up by Catholic and Jewish Emancipation to exploit the advantages of his liminal status, but aimed instead to integrate himself in English society as an Anglican-Masonic gentleman. In retrospect, his 55 years in London can be seen as a campaign to cross the threshold to social acceptability. In common with several foreign conductors (and in contrast to English singers), he anglicised his name from Michele Andrea to Michael Andrew – or, to close friends, 'Mike'. He took English nationality: Gruneisen announced, when he took over the Philharmonic, that he was now 'Mr Costa – for "signor" with us he shall be no more – he has morally as well as legally naturalised himself'. The ambivalence remained however: Gruneisen went on to refer to him as 'Signor' in the same article.⁶³

He became an Anglican and bought a vault in the new Kensal Green cemetery. Like many immigrants, he used Freemasonry as a route to status and integration. In 1875, he was appointed Junior Grand Warden, one of the two highest positions below the Grand Master (then the Prince of Wales), later becoming the Order's Grand Organist.⁶⁴ He took on an English persona, holidaying at typical English resorts such as Folkestone and Ventnor. In the few surviving letters of a personal nature, he expresses conventionally patriotic sentiments. He wrote from Paris: 'I have to say, nothing to compare with our dear old England'.⁶⁵

Given his austere and strange personality, it is remarkable how far he succeeded in assuming the role of an English gentleman. He became part of the musical life of the

⁶³ *Morning Post* (16 March 1846).

⁶⁴ Information kindly supplied by Diane Clements, Director of The Library and Museum of Freemasonry.

⁶⁵ Costa-Bartholomew (13 Nov. 1864), RCMA 3029. Appendix B.

royal family, organising private concerts and music sessions with them and orchestrating Prince Albert's *Invocazione all'Armonica* so that he could conduct it at the Birmingham Festival. He was the first foreign musician – and the first proper conductor – to be knighted.⁶⁶ This facilitated his admission to the Athenaeum Club, where he had been blackballed the year before.⁶⁷ He spoke and wrote English adequately.⁶⁸ He patronised musical events, such as the Musical Union and the Beethoven Quartet Society.⁶⁹ Although not socially gregarious, he attended Gladstone's working breakfasts and was one of the four witnesses (along with the French Ambassador and the Duke of Manchester) at Patti's wedding to the Marquis de Caux in 1868. There are anecdotes of him dining at the Marlborough Club with the Duke of Edinburgh and Arthur Sullivan; playing games with Millais and Effie at Ella's Mozart party for children; and being due to dine with Kate Dickens and Lady Devonshire at Chorley's just before the latter's death. In a letter from Paris, he boasted that he was dining out every night and could do so even more often 'if I had a triple stomach and the digestion of an ostrich'.⁷⁰

He also cultivated the characteristics that appealed to Victorian England. Although working in the louche world of the Opera, he avoided any whiff of scandal. In this respect he benefitted from his long association with the Sacred Harmonic Society,

66 The initiative seems to have come from the royal family. Gladstone replied to the Queen that he was 'aware of no reason against it.' Gladstone-Victoria (5 April 1869), RA, VIC/A 38/60.

67 Costa's rejection by the Athenaeum Club was ostensibly because he was a 'professor' (ie a professional) whereas George Smart had earlier been admitted because he was a knight, albeit a Dublin one.

68 The evidence is mixed. His friend William Spark stated that 'He spoke English well and wrote in a remarkably neat style'. Spark, *Musical Memories*, 11. But Gye's Diary parodies Costa's relapse into fractured English in moments of stress. 'You say I do wrong, I do wrong? I cannot do wrong! That is an impertinence to say I do wrong.' Gye, 14 July 1868. His letters are generally correct, sometimes idiomatic, though with some lapses: 'what wonderfull fellow is Benedict!!' Costa-Bartholomew (2 Sept. 1866), RCMA 3037; 'it is to lat (sic) to go to Sydenham but tomorrow I shall be there.' Costa-Grove, undated, RAM, 2005.1645.

69 *ILN* (4 April 1846), 205; and (28 March 1846), 210. Ella, *Musical Sketches Abroad and at Home* (London: Reeves, 1878), 246.

70 Costa-Bartholomew (2 Sept. 1866), RCMA 3037.

which boasted that wives and daughters ‘may feel themselves...as much under the



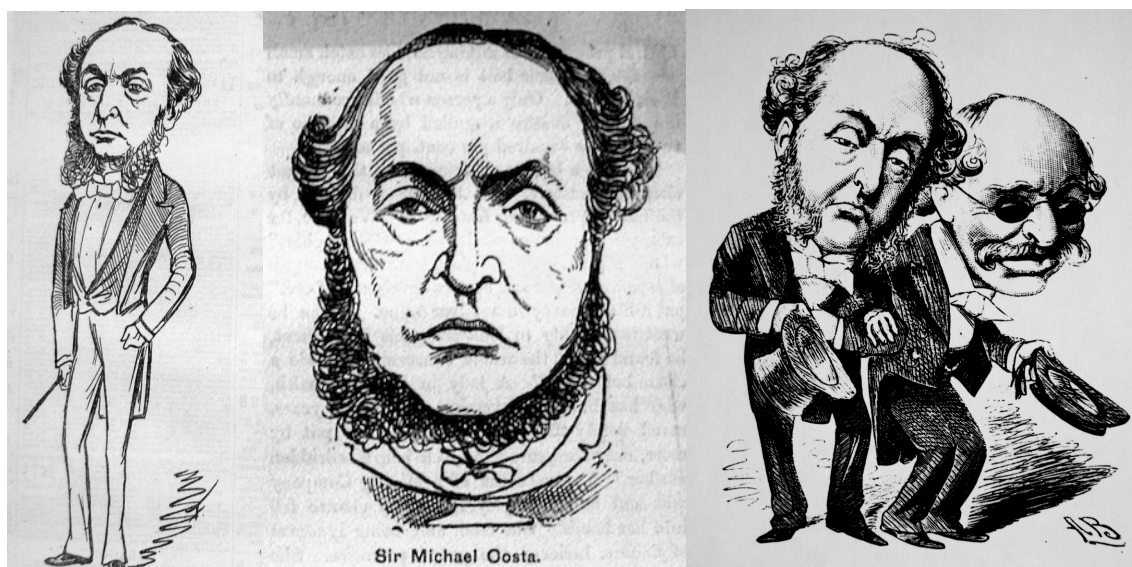
Figs 2.13/14 Typical portraits, showing Costa with top hat and no musical accessories.

protection of every member of the orchestra as if they were privately practising music in their own homes’.⁷¹ His respectable middle class status, living in one of Thomas Cubitt’s new stucco houses in Eccleston Square, helped him to avoid the stigma of being merely a professional musician. In his portraits, he usually appears as a prosperous gentleman rather than a musician (Figs 2.13/14). Even in his many caricatures, Costa is depicted as sober and authoritative rather than effeminate and actorly (like Jullien) or cacophonous (as with Berlioz, Liszt and Wagner) (Figs 2.15/7).⁷² His respectability and work ethic were one reason for Victoria’s admiration of him. She commented that he well deserved his knighthood, ‘being a good composer and admirable musician as well as a most respectable man’.⁷³

⁷¹ Bowley, *Sacred Harmonic Society*, 39.

⁷² Mathieson, ‘Embodying Music’, 116-125.

⁷³ RA, QVJ 14 April 1869.



Figs 2.15/16 Costa caricatures. Fig. 2.17 Costa and Benedict as 'Opera Knights'.

His reputation as a champion of the rank-and-file English musician helped him to avoid the suspicion that frequently attached to foreigners for favouring their fellow countrymen. As early as 1839, the *Musical World* gave Costa credit for the fact that 'there is scarcely one foreign artist in the band that could safely be replaced by native talent'.⁷⁴ The *ILN* described the first night of *Les Huguenots*, where nearly all the chorus and band were English, as 'a national triumph'.⁷⁵ In the 1860s, 71 of his 87 players were English.⁷⁶ He was seen as one of a small group of foreigners 'whom we regard more as compatriots than as strangers'.⁷⁷ He gained credit for staying in England 'rather than retiring to lead a *dolce far niente* life in the more genial atmosphere of his native city, Naples'.⁷⁸ He showed his cultural loyalty by becoming the leading conductor and composer of the quintessential English medium of the oratorio. Under his regime, the main musical platforms – Covent Garden, the Philharmonic, the Sacred

⁷⁴ *MW* (19 May 1839), 23.

⁷⁵ *ILN* (29 July 1848), 55.

⁷⁶ *Athenaeum* (10 Feb. 1866), 212.

⁷⁷ *MW* (22 May 1858), 328.

⁷⁸ Ella, *Musical Sketches*, 65.

Harmonic Society and the Handel Festival – came to be seen as proof that England was no longer a ‘Land Without Music’.

It is hard to imagine what more Costa could have done – with his town house, his knighthood and his close association with Court, Church, Lodge and the Handel-Mendelssohn industry – to identify with his adopted country. By comparison with other foreign singers and musicians based in London, he appears positively John Bullish. Indeed, Haweis described him as ‘a weighty square-built man with powerful arms and something of the real John Bull about the neck and shoulder’.⁷⁹

But he was not wholly successful in making the transition. The fact that he did not marry, unlike his brother Raphael who married an Englishwoman, probably made it harder to penetrate the inner sanctums of Englishness. Just as the Jewish Lord Beaconsfield or the Roman Catholic Cardinal Wiseman were never going to be considered as ‘English’ as Lord Russell or the Anglican Archbishop Benson, so the musical knights from abroad – Costa, Benedict, Halle, Manns – could move only part of the way to full integration. Costa adopted every available symbol and was an avid collector of honours. But, not having an English compass, his efforts were sometimes too obvious. Even after 50 years of successful assimilation, he never shared in those unspoken aspects of historic memory, humour, and ‘character’ that, in the last resort, were thought to mark a true English gentleman.

Costa offers few clues as to why he went to such lengths to escape from his Spanish-Neapolitan-Sephardic-Catholic origins into a not wholly convincing English identity. Perhaps he was anxious not to return to Naples, with its political instability, poor job prospects and possible family tensions. Perhaps he simply lacked the imagination and

⁷⁹ *Pall Mall Gazette* (2 May 1884).

self-confidence to exploit the liminal status of an itinerant musician and break the rules, like Liszt, Chopin and Berlioz. But a more persuasive explanation is that, by the late 1830s, he was well on the way to accumulating power and the trappings of success. Crucial to that success was his tenacious personality, which enabled him to secure a high degree of acceptance in England but which was itself shaped by this quest for acceptance.

2.6 Personality

Costa's first five years in England brought him a potent mix of painful experiences: the hurt of exile and of family separation; ridicule of his undeveloped voice and awkward stage manner; humiliation and veiled insults to his masculinity from his first orchestra; the stress of having to produce operas with disaffected players, feckless soloists and chaotic management; the dampening of his hopes of early success as a composer; and the struggle to make his way in an alien society. Such experiences would naturally engender in a young immigrant a profound sense of loneliness, vulnerability and even doubt about his identity.

Against this background, it is plausible that several of the central features of Costa's personality were developed as a defensive mechanism against these multiple threats. His bid to be accepted as an English Anglican Freemason can be seen as a defence against the prejudices that would otherwise have worked against him as a foreigner, a southern Italian Catholic and perhaps also as a Jew. His correctness over relationships and his frequent recourse to the press to counter false reports suggest a man anxious not to leave any space for criticism. His system of control can be seen as an instrument for imposing order on his disorderly milieu. His gruff and enclosed manner shielded him

against ridicule and humiliation, while preserving a degree of privacy in the midst of his hectic public schedule.

This mix of defensive responses provided Costa with a carapace of authority that enabled him to carve a successful early career, exploiting the strengths and minimising the disadvantages of his liminal position. This not only protected his vulnerability but also helped him to impose his will on others. Costa used his autocratic image to predispose musicians, managers, critics and even composers not to cross him. His fearsome reputation was well illustrated by the story of Masini, an Italian tenor who skipped rehearsals for *Faust* and airily suggested that Costa should call at his hotel to hear what tempi he preferred. On learning from the Italian Legation of Costa's status and reputation, Masini fled in the night back to Italy.⁸⁰

At the height of his authority in the 1850s, Costa's support was seen as a precondition for a successful musician in London. Even Berlioz approached Costa tactfully over the performance of *Benvenuto Cellini* at Covent Garden and of his works at the Philharmonic.⁸¹ Wagner recognised that 'the great Costa' was 'the real leader of music in London' – to the extent of breaking his strict rule by paying a courtesy call on him on arrival.⁸²

Other early professional conductors on the Continent – Guhr, Habeneck, Chélaré, Musard – felt a similar need to develop an autocratic image. Like them, Costa accumulated remarkable contractual powers and exploited the metaphor of the military commander, which became one of the clichés of musical journalism (Chapter 5). But

⁸⁰ Mapleson, *Memoirs*, 129-30.

⁸¹ Berlioz-Hogarth and Berlioz-Costa in eds Pierre Citron, Yves Gérard and Hugh J. Macdonald, *Correspondence Generale*, vol. 4 (1983), nos 1567 (23 Feb.), 1588 (20 April), 1598 (10 May), 1612 (7 July).

⁸² Wagner, *My Life* (London: Constable, 1963), 621.

Costa needed to take the quest for authority further, in order to impose order in three intractable domains: the opera, the concert hall and the mammoth festival. This helps to explain why he defended his authority so uncompromisingly and resigned whenever he failed to get his way.

Costa's other prominent traits fit well with the explanation offered above. Maintaining such defence mechanisms would have required a high degree of self-discipline. Davison traced his power over the musicians to this: 'a man of strength, order and discipline...a man born to command...He could command himself and he could command others'.

Joseph Bennett also ascribed his authority to his self-discipline: 'He himself set an example of strict discipline...he never relaxed in the discharge of his own duties.'⁸³ His obsession with punctuality was the subject of many anecdotes, summed up by

Mapleson's amusing pen-picture:

At no theatre where Sir Michael Costa conducted did it begin a minute late. The model orchestral chief arrived with a chronometer in each of his waistcoat pockets; and when, after consulting his timepieces, he saw that the moment for beginning had arrived, he raised his baton, and the performance began. He did not even take the trouble to see that the musicians were all in their places. He knew that, with the discipline he maintained, they must be there.⁸⁴

Developing and sustaining his system also called for exceptional drive and application.

Until the illness and fatigue of his last years, Costa's long career was marked by an energy impressive even by Victorian standards. He was 'the ubiquitous Costa' (Percy Scholes) and 'the able, energetic, indefatigable Costa' (Henry Davison).⁸⁵ It was this that enabled him, in the early 1850s, to direct the Philharmonic, the Sacred Harmonic Society and several major festivals as well as being the sole conductor at Covent Garden. It was a workload unique in English music. His 1851 season involved 8

⁸³ *MW* (23 May 1846). *Musical Times* (1 Oct. 1897), 664-6. Bennett, *Forty Years*, 51.

⁸⁴ Mapleson, *Memoirs*, 131.

⁸⁵ Scholes, *The Mirror of Music 1844-1944* (London: Novello, 1947), 162. Davison, *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*, 108.

Philharmonic concerts, over 30 oratorio performances, festival and concert appearances, as well as 20 different operas over 60 nights – 106 nights in all – compared with 59 concerts in George Smart’s ‘annus mirabilis’ of 1825.⁸⁶ In the second week of April 1850, he conducted a Philharmonic concert on the Monday, *Lucrezia Borgia* on the Tuesday, *Norma* and two acts of *Masaniello* on the Thursday and *Elijah* at the Sacred Harmonic Society on the Friday.

Costa’s protective exterior also gave him a remarkable imperturbability – what singer Charles Santley identified as ‘impassivity’: ‘it was impossible to read his thoughts; the only visible sign of approbation or the contrary which he ever vouchsafed was a peculiar twist at the back of his neck’.⁸⁷ His unflustered composure served him well when things went awry in performance. It also enabled him to insist on his demands, however embarrassing this would have been to more clubbable contemporaries like Balfe and Arditi.

There was a daunting side to his autocracy. Adelina Patti complained of his ‘overbearing conduct’.⁸⁸ Grove referred to his harsh voice.⁸⁹ The conductor Frederick Cowen recalled ‘a loud angry voice, his eyelids twitching nervously...an abrupt and far from prepossessing manner, which made us all very frightened of him’.⁹⁰ His friend William Spark admitted that ‘very frequently his exhibitions of sharp temper, quick speech and over-ruling manner led him to be regarded with fear and jealousy by many

⁸⁶ John Carnelley, ‘Sir George Smart and the Evolution of British Musical Culture 1800 -1840’, Ph.D. diss., Goldsmiths College, University of London (2008).

⁸⁷ Santley, cited in Norris, *Stanford the Cambridge Jubilee and Tchaikovsky* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1880), 118.

⁸⁸ Gye, 24 May 1872.

⁸⁹ Grove in *Pall Mall Gazette* (1 May 1884).

⁹⁰ Cowen, *My Art and My Friends*, 47.

who did not understand his real character'.⁹¹ Gye's *Diary* shows that Costa could be brusque and domineering. Mapleson confirms this picture, describing him as 'a despot' whom even the formidable Gye feared. By the discreet standards of Victorian writing, these portraits are surprisingly blunt.

But many who knew him well detected, behind his intimidating manner, a kindly and above all fair disposition. Santley wrote that, despite his 'somewhat cold and distant' manner and 'curtness in his remarks and gestures', his reputation as a 'tyrant' was unmerited.⁹² Cowen described him as 'very just' and 'not unkindly'. There are plenty of testimonies from orchestral players to his generosity and to the loyalty that this inspired. Stanford, who had much to say against Costa's influence on mid-Victorian music, saw him as 'very kindly...under a cloak of apparent reserve'.⁹³ Even Lumley, who suffered when Costa led 53 players and 45 choristers from Her Majesty's to Covent Garden in 1846, admitted that they followed him 'just as a band of *condottieri* might in the middle ages have followed an admired captain who had taken service under a new sovereign'.⁹⁴ Such loyalty was not inspired solely by fear and self-interest. Towards the end of his career, 14 players followed him in 1871 from Covent Garden to join Mapleson's company, where their financial prospects were worse. These testimonies suggest that, behind his forbidding exterior, Costa inspired remarkable respect and loyalty.

The caricature of Costa as an uncompromising martinet needs also to be balanced against evidence that he was capable of flexibility and pragmatism. He showed considerable tact when handling older established players like Dragonetti, Spagnoletti

⁹¹ William Spark, *Musical Memories*, 2-3.

⁹² Charles Santley, *Student and Singer: The Reminiscences of Charles Santley* (London: Edward Arnold, 1892), 147.

⁹³ Charles Villiers Stanford, *Interludes Records and Reflections* (London: John Murray, 1921), 35.

⁹⁴ Lumley, *Reminiscences*, 158.

and Lindley and incompetent players who needed to be eased out gently. He backed away from outright war with the Philharmonic in 1860 over Monday night operas; and he ceded ground to Gye in some of their confrontations (Chapter 7). There is a touching story of Costa refusing to release the Opera players for a concert by Sterndale Bennett, but relenting on being told that his brother Raphael might be invited to sing there.⁹⁵

Costa's liminal position in England may account for some of his other characteristics. Anxious to be accepted in an alien world and to avoid ridicule and criticism, Costa was famously conscientious. The *Athenaeum* remarked that Costa 'always took special care that proper preparation had been secured before the nights of performance'.⁹⁶ The only discordant evidence comes from the early years at Covent Garden, when one of the partners, Chappell, and the Director, Delafield, complained about 'Costa's want of energy in getting out the operas'.⁹⁷ These comments probably reflect the impatience of the shareholders to rush works into production to buttress their shaky finances. In that year, Costa rehearsed and conducted 71 performances of 19 operas, plus public concerts at Covent Garden and eight subscription concerts at the Philharmonic. The clear picture from other observers is that he was a conscientious workaholic.

His correctness can also be seen in his attitude to money. Gye portrays him as profligate with Gye's money while being exigent about the financial terms of his own contracts.⁹⁸ But most of the evidence points rather to a self-consciously 'gentlemanly' disdain for money. He tried to refund what he thought was an overpayment following a concert at

⁹⁵ Bennett, *Life of Bennett*, 299.

⁹⁶ *Athenaeum* (9 Aug 1879), 187.

⁹⁷ Gye, 1 and 11 April 1848.

⁹⁸ Gye, 2 April 1849.

Kensington Palace.⁹⁹ There are numerous examples of him performing for nothing at charity and national concerts and helping to finance holidays for musicians.¹⁰⁰ During the Ottoman Sultan's state visit to Covent Garden in 1867, when Gye accepted a gold and diamond brooch, Costa (who had composed an ode for the occasion) refused a gift of £200, saying that he did not compose for money.¹⁰¹ But the paradox remains, since minor contractual debts were at the heart of Costa's rupture with Gye in the mid-1860s and with Mapleson a decade later.

Despite his obvious zeal to become fully naturalised, Costa retained a flavour of the South. Gye frequently remarked on his extreme pride and sensitivity. Mapleson added that Costa was 'not only peculiarly sensitive but also remarkably vindictive'.¹⁰² The *Musical Times* obituary regretted his 'inability to forget or forgive'.¹⁰³ He showed a Neapolitan tendency towards vendetta, for example against Harris (the Covent Garden stage manager), Anderson (a Philharmonic Director) and especially Sterndale Bennett. Not only did he refuse to conduct Sterndale Bennett's Ode for the 1862 Exhibition and the SHS performance of the Dead March from *Saul* in Bennett's memory. He also declined to sign the petition for Bennett to be buried in Westminster Abbey and rejected peace overtures in 1866 when Bennett's oratorio *The Woman of Samaria* was performed at the Birmingham Festival, telling the luckless intermediary 'Remember 1848'.¹⁰⁴ The

⁹⁹ RA, Vic add J 1586 and 1587 of 20 and 24 May 1835. The Palace insisted on paying Costa the full rate of 15 guineas.

¹⁰⁰ Ella, *Musical Sketches*, 76. *Times* (14 May 1862). *Morning Post* (6 Sept. 1836).

¹⁰¹ Gye, 20 July 1867.

¹⁰² Mapleson, *Memoirs*, 306.

¹⁰³ *Musical Times* (1 June 1884), 321-3.

¹⁰⁴ For the 1862 episode see Costa-*Times* (26 April 1862). On the Birmingham Festival peace overture, see Bennett, *Life of Bennett*, 367.

picture may have been exaggerated, especially by Bennett's son, as part of a good story.

But it reinforced the caricature of Costa as obdurate and, by implication, un-English.

What emerges is a man consciously using an austere, authoritarian facade to hide a sensitive and introverted personality. Such a complex make-up inevitably contained a high degree of paradox. The martinet who disciplined a musician for arriving with muddy shoes was also the man who, visiting a sick chorister, slipped five sovereigns into his pill-box with the hint that 'this will do you good'.¹⁰⁵ The stern conductor was also the man who allowed his players to surprise the soprano Castelli by playing a *pianissimo* passage in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* very loudly.¹⁰⁶ The austere disciplinarian of few words – and 'not usually profuse in his compliments' – was also the man whom Spark described as being, in private, 'always animated and cheerful, full of racy anecdotes' and whom Santley defined as an affable gourmet who 'delighted in a bit of gossip or mild scandal'.¹⁰⁷ The brusque man who appears in Gye's *Diary* was also the courtier who extemporised elegant compliments about Prince Albert's newly printed *Te Deum*.¹⁰⁸ The ambitious seeker of authority also turned down an invitation to conduct at Drury Lane in 1870 (when he was unemployed) because he believed that the post had been promised to Arditì. Stanford, who stressed Costa's autocratic side, also described how the ageing conductor helped him to prepare a performance of his Serenade in G at

¹⁰⁵ Haweis in *Pall Mall Gazette* (2 May 1884).

¹⁰⁶ Ella Diary, 2 June 1836.

¹⁰⁷ Costa 'not a talkative man' on musical subjects and 'gossip' in Santley, *Student and Singer*, 175; 'not given to compliments' in Macfarren, *Memories: an Autobiography*, 153; 'Racy anecdotes' in Spark, *Musical Memories*, 12.

¹⁰⁸ 'Just as Costa had left the room, Albert's *Te Deum* properly written out arrived and we called him back and sang it with him.... He was, as everyone must be, extremely struck by its beauty, originality and solemnity, the music fitting the words so well.' QVJ 2 Dec 1843.

Birmingham in 1882. 'He quite belied my anticipations of a haughty and stand-off reception, and was most genial and hospitable'.¹⁰⁹

His social manner was seen by many as uncommunicative and humourless. His work ethic had its ludicrous side, as when he rebuked a second oboe for arriving late at a rehearsal and, on learning that the man had been attending his wife's confinement, told him not to let it happen again.¹¹⁰ But close friends described him as gregarious. 'Always the gentleman, observant of social usage'.¹¹¹ For Herman Klein, he was a 'charming well-bred man'.¹¹² There are stories of Costa joining Lablache and Rubini in a spoof audition of an Italian chef who had pretensions to being a good singer; of his smiling when the band conspired to expose John Ella's weak *coup d'archet* after he had compared his colleagues unfavourably with the attack of the Paris Opera¹¹³; of his roaring with laughter on hearing a fellow Mason singing the popular song 'Jolly Nose' with a stentorian upper C.¹¹⁴ But the fact that these humorous moments are quoted suggest that they were infrequent.

Such paradoxes help to explain why he was read in contradictory ways by different contemporaries. To a degree unusual even on the London music scene, he had a polarising effect, attracting enmity from some and devotion from others. Costa's outer shell of reserve made it difficult for many to perceive the man inside. Gye's Diary,

¹⁰⁹ Stanford, *Pages from an Unwritten Diary* (London: Edward Arnold, 1914), 202-3.

¹¹⁰ Kuhe, *My Musical Recollections* (London: Richard Bentley, 1896), 61.

¹¹¹ *Musical Times*, (1 June 1884), 321-3.

¹¹² Herman Klein, *Musicians and Mummies* (London: Cassell, 1925), 300.

¹¹³ F.J. Crowest, *Musician's Wit, Humour and Anecdote* (London: Scott, 1902), 258.

¹¹⁴ Spark, *Musical Memories*, 5.

which describes over 21 years of intense collaboration, reveals very little human rapport between them and little insight into Costa's nature.

His public persona, like his system, was fixed by about 1840. His biography thereafter consists largely of the working out of that powerful combination of system and personality in his conducting career. It was a career that occupied him to the exclusion of almost anything else. If he had married – or become a prominent composer or musical entrepreneur or even a socialite – he might have had to adapt to his environment. As it was, he had no reason to alter a formula which both protected his ego and enabled him to resist intrusion into his sphere of authority. Being a cautious man, he had no incentive to expose himself to the risks of further change. This may help to explain his resistance to innovation in repertory or musical methods (Chapters 9 and 10) and the inflexibility which was a marked feature of his later career.

Costa's inner personality remains elusive. But the evidence suggests that a traumatic start in England, perhaps linked with family tensions in Naples, encouraged him to develop a taciturn authoritarian manner and to hide his inner nature behind the trappings of a masonic English gentleman. Thanks to an immense effort of will and application, he ensured that his 'London' persona largely overlaid his Southern Italian persona. There remains a sense that he never wholly escaped from the liminal position of his Spanish-Jewish-Neapolitan origins and that the co-existence of these two identities perplexed many contemporaries. But, despite its contradictions, Costa's public persona – his self-contained imperturbability and abrasive determination to have his own way – was ideally suited to his goal of bringing order, discipline and system to the anarchical world of music in England.

Chapter 3: Conducting Prior to 1830

The central contention of this thesis is that Michael Costa was the principal architect in England of a new model of orchestral management, which I propose to call that of ‘manager-conductor’. Costa personified the emergence of the conductor as an essential part of musical performance, which was arguably the most fundamental of the many changes that occurred in the field of music in the first half of the century. His system combined many of the features of modern conducting, though it went beyond later practice in the range of his prerogatives. To grasp its significance, it is necessary first to examine how orchestras and choirs were managed and controlled in the previous two generations.

In this period, the term ‘conductor’ was a vague and promiscuous concept. It could refer to the composer, arranger, rehearsaler, supervisor, programme-fixer, leader or accompanist. Its indiscriminate use misled later generations into the anachronism of assuming that ‘conductor’ meant in 1830 what it conveyed in say 1850. A vivid illustration of this sort of anachronism was given in the film *Amadeus*, where Tom Hulce portrayed Mozart conducting opera, choral, and orchestral works, with his back to the audience, elbows wagging, as if he were a twentieth century maestro (Fig. 3.1). The notion of ‘conductor’ has been further confused by the teleological assumption that there was an inevitable trend to the modern model of conducting, an



Fig. 3.1 Tom Hulce in the film *Amadeus*: an anachronistic image of 18th-century ‘conducting’.

assumption encouraged by the speed with which this model was adopted in the generation up to 1850.

In attempting to describe the various forms of orchestral control in the period 1780-1830, a word of caution is needed. In their quest to find an ancestor for the all-powerful conductor of the late nineteenth-century, some music scholars such as Carse have tended to over-define the roles of ‘leader’, ‘maestro al cembalo’ and ‘conductor’ in the earlier period. Applying a nineteenth-century notion of specialisation to eighteenth century models, they have exaggerated the competitive tension caused by ‘divided direction’. In practice, there was often no requirement for intrusive control in the small baroque and early classical orchestra. An anonymous German source noted in 1799 that:

Where an orchestra is arranged so that its members can all see and hear one another, where it is staffed with virtuosos, where the composer has included performance indications in the parts, and where there are sufficient rehearsals, then no further direction is necessary: the piece plays itself like a clock that has been wound up and set running.¹

Even when these conditions were not met, there was often a reasonable degree of cooperation between the piano and violin-leader. Gluck, Haydn and Mozart directed in both ways. Mozart rescued a performance of *Il Seraglio* in Vienna in 1782 by playing on the piano. At the first performance of his Paris Symphony at the *Concert Spirituel*, he planned if necessary to ‘snatch the fiddle from La Houssaye, the first violin, and conduct myself’.²

In the transitional period between 1780 and about 1830, there was no inevitable trend towards conducting – whether with a baton or not – but rather a range of models, which varied from region to region and according to the music being played. In very broad

¹ Deutsche Biedermann, *Wahrheiten die Musik betreffend* (Frankfurt: Eichenbergsche Erben, 1779).

² John Spitzer and Neal Zaslaw, *The Birth of the Orchestra*, 392. Mozart-father (3 July 1778), *The Letters of Mozart to his Family*, trans. E. Anderson (London: Macmillan, 1985), 558.

terms, orchestral players tended to follow their leader; opera singers looked to the *maestro* or Musical Director for cues, but often set their own tempi; concert soloists needed a relatively free rein; while choruses depended on visible (and sometimes audible) time-beating. The degree of control varied according to whether the musicians were competent professionals and how new or challenging the music was. Much depended too on personal authority: a composer like Haydn or Spohr had greater authority than someone like George Smart, who merely superintended the works of others. The model varied too from region to region: in France, the trend was away from baton-directing towards violin-leading, but the opera differed from the concert hall and Paris differed from the provinces.

What follows is thus an over-schematic account of the three principal functions that coexisted untidily when Costa settled in London in 1829: leader (*chef d'orchestre* or *Konzertmeister*), Music Director (*maitre de musique* or *Kappelmeister*) and *maestro al cembalo* (*répétiteur*).

3.1 The Theory: Leader, *Maestro al Cembalo* and Musical Director

The leader, usually the first violinist but occasionally a cellist or bass-player, was defined by Thomas Busby's Dictionary in 1806 as 'a performer who in a concert takes the principal violin, receives the time and style of the several movements from the conductor and communicates them to the rest of the band'.³ It was the leader who guided the dynamics and tempi during the performance, when the *maestro* or Music Director has less direct contact with the players. He provided leadership by his playing, his body movements and, if necessary, by beating time with his bow. He was often more prominently seated within the orchestra, sometimes on a high chair. His influence on

³ Thomas Busby, *Complete Dictionary of Music*, 1806 edition (London: Gillet, 1806), under 'Leader'.

performance and on the management of the players was especially strong in the concert hall. When the Philharmonic was created in 1813, its prospectus specified that ‘the station of every performer shall be absolutely determined by the Leader of the Night’.⁴

The functions of the *maestro al cembalo* were defined as ‘the *direction and management* of the performance’.⁵ Unless a visiting composer was supervising his own works, the *maestro* carried the main responsibility for what were often known as ‘pianoforte rehearsals’. At the performance itself, he sat at the cembalo/pianoforte, playing the keyboard part of the basso continuo (if the score required this) and only occasionally intervening to correct the performance. This post tended to be more prominent at the opera and ballet, where he provided the secco recitative for the singers and often composed or at least re-arranged scores for the instruments that were locally available. The lowly status of the *maestro* was implicit in his salary at the Italian Opera in 1829 of a mere twenty shillings a night, compared with £4 paid to the bass Dragonetti.⁶

At many opera houses – and some concerts – there was also a Musical Director, whose functions overlapped with those of the *maestro* and leader. According to John Ebers, who managed the King’s Theatre in the 1820s, the Musical Director:

assists the manager in the selection of the performances; and when fixed upon, he distributes the parts to the singers, and directs the general routine of representation, the effecting of which, in the minuter details, devolves on the stage manager, *and the conductor of the music*.⁷

4 BL RPS MSS K.6.d.3.

5 Busby, *Dictionary*, 1806 edition, under ‘maestro’.

6 *Harmonicon*, vol. VII, no. 3 (March 1829), 70. Fiona M Palmer, *Dragonetti in England (1794-1846): The Career of a Double Bass Virtuoso* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 113.

7 Ebers, *Seven Years at the King’s Theatre* (London: 1828), 361.

This implies a distinction between preparation (mainly the task of the *maestro* or Musical Director) and performance (mainly in the hands of the leader). The Musical Director's actual functions depended on the traditions of the institution, the type of music being performed and the personalities involved. This is clear from the odd assortment of people who occupied the post at Her Majesty's Theatre in the 1820s: William Ayrton (editor of *The Harmonicon*), Petracchi (an administrative official from La Scala), the castrato Velluti, the composers Coccia and Rossini and the harpist Nicholas Bochsa. Rossini was said to 'preside' at the pianoforte but his job was mainly to rearrange and prepare imported works for performance in London. Bochsa, five years later, ran the ballet and composed pastiches, but also 'presided' at the pianoforte as 'conductor' of the opera concerts.⁸

Several factors favoured direction from the keyboard rather than another instrument. The keyboard player was often the composer and/or the *Kapellmeister*; he was often the only person with a full score; he was less preoccupied than the leader with playing an instrument; and he could coach and accompany the singers, playing the bass line with his left hand and supplying cues (or filling in missing parts) with his right. C.P.E. Bach, who believed that 'the keyboard-player is and always will be the reference point for the beat,' suggested that he should mark the beat with the rise and fall of his hands.⁹ He had several options to intervene – by playing the keyboard, striking the desk, waving a baton or using the bass or cello leaders who often flanked him and shared his score.¹⁰ Most German manuals of the late eighteenth century favoured direction from the

⁸ *Times* (4 and 28 May 1829).

⁹ *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* (Berlin: 1753-62), 5-6.

¹⁰ The bass player Dragonetti was frequently praised and blamed for steering the orchestra towards order or disorder. *MW* (2 May 1837), 131.

keyboard.¹¹ Rousseau's Dictionary described him as 'le veritable et premier guide de tout'.¹²

In the opera house, with the orchestra stretched thinly across the shallow pit, it was often difficult for the lead violin to exercise effective control. One early nineteenth-century engraving of Covent Garden shows the *maestro* (or perhaps Musical Director) prominent in the centre of the pit, immediately in front of the soloists, with the players on either side presumably taking the lead from him (Fig. 3.2).

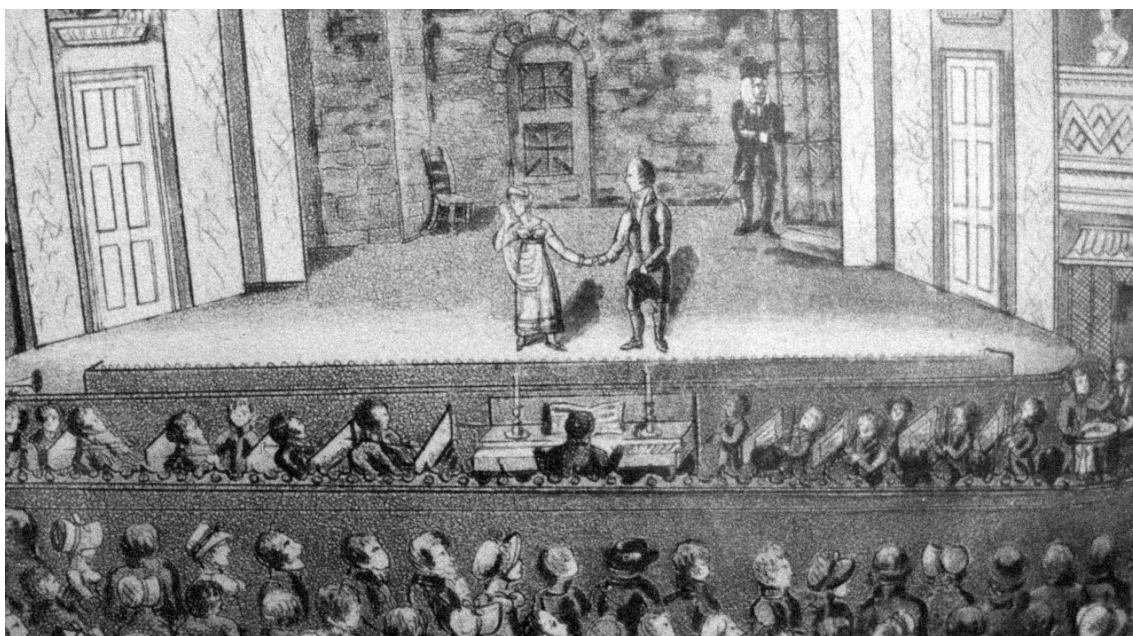


Fig. 3.2 Engraving of Covent Garden around 1800, showing the players separated by the centrally placed *maestro*.

But many forms of music (ballet, concerti, some instrumental works) did not require a keyboard instrument, which was disappearing from some German theatre orchestras.¹³ Even where it remained, the *maestro al cembalo*'s ability to influence performance was weakened as the harpsichord gave way to the fortepiano, which was less able to penetrate the orchestral sound (which was itself becoming louder). There were

11 Biedermann (1779), Forkel (1783), Rochlitz (1799) and Koch (1802). Cited in Spitzer and Zaslaw, *Birth of the Orchestra*, 392.

12 Rousseau, *Dictionnaire de Musique* (Paris: Duchesne, 1768) under 'Orchestra', 198 under 'Ensemble'.

13 J.C.F. Rellstab, *Ueber die Bemerkungen eines Reisenden* (Berlin:1879), 147.

objections that the piano introduced an alien tone-colour in orchestral pieces and reverberated after the other instruments had stopped playing.¹⁴ As the *maestro al cembalo* gradually ceased to be the household employee of the patron of the orchestra, he was less often the person who composed or arranged the music for performance. He did not share the orchestra's esprit de corps. 'With his isolated instrument [he] can gain little respect from the rest of the musicians. He will always be a stranger to them'.¹⁵ This was the more so if he lacked the prestige of being himself a competent instrumentalist, as Berlioz was to experience.

As a broad generalisation, direction by the leading string player was becoming more usual at the turn of the century, especially in orchestral music, which was the growth area in the expanding concert structure. The leader's advantages were that he was usually more centrally placed than the early baton-conductors, who tended to stand to one side and to conduct sideways to the audience and orchestra.¹⁶ He was at the head of the largest contingent, the string section, whose instruments (already better developed technically) provided the core of the ensemble. He usually had the prestige of being a competent player, whose pre-eminence was recognised by the other musicians. He was better able to guide the dynamics, which were increasingly expressed not through the keyboard and *basso continuo* but through instrumental parts.

Leading by the example of a fellow instrumentalist was seen as more respectful to the other players who, in a small orchestra, did not need to be regimented by a third party. It was also less likely to distract the attention of the audience than a baton-conductor who,

14 *Berliner Allgemeine Musik Zeitung* (1829, no. 6), 286 .

15 F.C. Arnold, *Der angehende Musikdirektor* (Erfurt: Henningschen Buchhandlung, 1806), 139.

16 Bowen, *The Cambridge Companion to Conducting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 104-5. Grove 1 noted in 1879 that German conductors still often stood to one side with their left side to the room. Under 'Conductor', 389-90.

like Spontini, caused offence by turning his back on the audience.¹⁷ There were also respectable theoretical arguments against time-beating. Schumann claimed that baton-conducting undermined the players' creativity.¹⁸ Many musicians preferred that time should be beaten only sporadically. Moritz Hauptmann objected to 'the cursed little white stick' in Spohr's Cassel orchestra. Edward Devrient complained about 'the continued beating throughout a movement that must necessarily become mechanical...the conductor ought to beat time only when the difficulty of certain passages, or unsteadiness of the performers, rendered it necessary'.¹⁹



Fig. 3.3 The celebrated violin-leader, François-Antoine Habeneck, conducting with his bow.

As the leading orchestras became autonomous institutions rather than court employees, they were increasingly identified with their violin leaders: Cannabich in Mannheim, Salomon in London, La Houssaye and especially Habeneck in Paris (Fig.3.3). By the turn of the century, 'every major European orchestra was led by the first violin'.²⁰ Works on the duties of the violin-leader allocated to him a wider range of management

¹⁷ *Harmonicon*, vol. VIII, no. 1 (Jan 1830), 8.

¹⁸ Robert Schumann, *Music and Musicians*, trans. Ritter (London: 1891), vol. 1, 37.

¹⁹ Edward Devrient, *My Recollections of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy*, trans. Macfarren (London: 1869), 60.

²⁰ Spitzer and Zaslaw, *Birth of the Orchestra*, 392.

tasks: selecting the orchestra, tuning, seating arrangements, even cuing the singers and rescuing performance when they went wrong. One authority demanded that the players should follow their leader ‘even when he makes a mistake’.²¹

Direction by the leader was strongly marked in Paris, where reform was pioneered by the violinist Habeneck through the Conservatoire’s *Concerts Spirituels* (1818-29) and where the audible (and much-criticised) *batteur de mesure* was seen as less necessary as performance standards rose.²² But even here the leader’s role was becoming divorced from playing: Mendelssohn described Habeneck as using his bow as a baton and rarely playing his violin.²³ Although some German music centres were embracing baton-conducting, violin-directing was still the rule at Stuttgart and Cologne and piano-directing at Hanover and Munich.²⁴ In Italian opera houses, the singers tended to come under the *maestro al cembalo* and the instrumentalists under the leader.²⁵

This picture over-simplifies the wide variety of local practices and formats and over-states the tension between conductor and leader at the turn of the century. But competition for control was latent in such a set-up. There were powerful factors that made it increasingly necessary to achieve more effective central control.

21 F. Galeazzi, *Elementi teorico-pratici di musica* (Rome: Cracas, 1791-6), vol. 1, 211.

22 For good descriptions of the evolution of French practice see David Charlton, ‘A maître d’orchestre Conducts: New and Old Evidence on French Practice’, *Early Music*, vol. 21 (1993), 341–353; and Nicolas Southon, ‘L’émergence de la figure du chef d’orchestre et ses composantes socio-artistiques: François-Antoine Habeneck (1781-1849). La naissance du professionnalisme musical’. Ph.D diss., Tours, 9 Sept. 2008.

23 Mendelssohn letter (6 April 1825), ed. Elbers, *Felix Mendelssohn: A Life in Letters*, trans. Craig Tomlinson (New York: 1986), 36.

24 H.B. and C.L.E. Cox, *Leaves from the Journal of Sir G Smart* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1907) passim.

25 For a full discussion of arrangements on the Continent see Adam Carse, *The Orchestra from Beethoven to Berlioz* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1948) and Spitzer and Zaslaw, *Birth of the Orchestra*.

First the increase in the size of the orchestra. Haydn had managed with about 20 players at Eszterhaza (13 strings balanced by 3 wind), though his Salomon concert series in London in the 1790s called for between 40 and 60 players. By 1830 the larger symphonic works of Beethoven, Spohr and Mendelssohn demanded a wider range of wind and brass instruments – themselves becoming more powerful – and proportionately more string players to balance them. A standard orchestra of 2 flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones and kettle drum needed 24 violins, 8 violas, 10 cellos, 8 basses – a total of 50. Reflecting this change, the bible of orchestral structure, Koch's *Lexikon*, raised its specification from only 34 players in 1802 to about 58 in 1865.²⁶ Beethoven's Symphony no. 9, composed mainly in 1823, called for an orchestra of 60. Berlioz (Fig. 3.8) wanted an orchestra of 119 – and fantasised about an ideal super-band of 465 players for his imaginary town of Euphonia. Such expansion made it harder for the violin-leader or keyboard-player to control performance. Describing the position at the Philharmonic in 1820, Spohr commented on 'the impossibility...of an orchestra of 50 or 60 ever obtaining an ensemble'.²⁷

Second, some composers, especially Beethoven and Weber, were asking for more complex dynamic and tempo variations within movements. Whereas the leader guided the first three movements of Beethoven's Symphony no. 9 in Leipzig and Vienna, a time-beater was needed for the choral movement.²⁸ More expressive and complex scores placed a heavier technical burden on the first violin and made it harder for him at the same time to guide his fellow-players. The violinist Ferdinand David, deputising for Mendelssohn, wrote to him: 'It is embarrassing to have to conduct and lead at the same

²⁶ H.C. Koch, *Musikalisches Lexikon* (Frankfurt: 1802).

²⁷ Quoted in E. Speyer, *Wilhelm Speyer der Liederkomponist* (Munich: 1925), 51.

²⁸ Wagner, *My Life*, 56-7.

time. The more modern pieces...demand conducting throughout and by one who is himself not required to play'.²⁹ *The Harmonicon*, reporting from the Paris Opera, observed that:

the leader of a numerous musical army will encounter great difficulties if at the same time he must attend to the singers, to his own particular troops, to the score and at the same time draw those pure sounds from an instrument which ought alone to claim all his attention...a general should direct his army, and rarely fight himself.³⁰

Third, from about 1815, technical developments were changing the structure and character of the orchestra. The strings acquired better bows. The woodwind and brass became more powerful, with keys and slides that made them fully chromatic. The *basso continuo* and harpsichord were gradually replaced by a wider range of percussion. Other new instruments appeared: bass clarinet (first used in *Les Huguenots* in 1836), valve trumpets and horns (first used in *La Juive* in 1835), as well as piccolo, English horn, serpentone, ophicleide and (from the 1840s) tuba. Sections of the orchestra were increasingly subdivided to achieve a wider palette of sound.³¹ From about 1780, composers were also writing works that called for greater instrumental skill – beyond the third position in the violin, the first in the viola and outside the clef in the lower strings. Amateurs and ‘many-handed’ musicians, who could double on several instruments, were giving way to professionals who specialised in one instrument. These rank-and-file professionals (*‘ripieni’*) became a separate category of musician, with demanding skills that distinguished them from the mixture of soloists, teachers and amateurs who had reinforced many eighteenth century orchestras. The Belgian writer Fétis remarked that no musical domain had gone through greater changes than the

29 J. Eckardt, *Ferdinand David und die Familie Mendelssohn-Bartholdy* (Leipzig:1860),149.

30 *Harmonicon*, vol. III, no. 48 (June 1825), 103.

31 Alan Houtchens, ‘Romantic Composers Respond to Challenge and Demand’ in ed. Peyser, *The Orchestra: Origins and Transformations* (New York: Watson-Guption, 2004), 178.

make-up of orchestras: a combination of new instruments, higher technical skills, and the quest for novelty had led to revolutionary changes culminating in ‘the éclat of the Rossinian orchestra’.³²

Fourth, an ‘ideology of orchestral performance practice’ was emerging in manuals that emphasised the distinction between solo playing and orchestral performance, with the *concertini* soloists communicating their own feelings and the *ripieni* being asked to provide a collective sound.³³ There was a move away from ornamentation and towards uniform bowing, which had previously been a feature only of elite orchestras that drew on one violin school.³⁴ It was increasingly assumed that orchestras everywhere were basically similar, playing to approximately the same pitch and a more elaborate standard notation. With the correct notation and practice:

a composer in Naples can send his score to Moscow or to London or to some other distant place and may be confident that, wherever the same rules and musical forms are recognised and implemented, his composition will sound the same and have the same effect.³⁵

The spread of this new ideology was fostered by the easier exchange of scores, players, singers and directors after the Napoleonic Wars.

Finally, what John H Plumb has called ‘the commercialisation of leisure’ encouraged the application to music of the processes of specialisation that were a marked feature of the early nineteenth-century, notably in England.³⁶ It is anachronistic to speak of a ‘music industry’ in 1830 but the performance of music was undergoing more rapid change than at any period before or since. The many tasks of musical production –

³² Fétis, *Curiosités Historiques* (Paris: Janet et Cotele, 1830), 272.

³³ Spitzer and Zaslaw, *Birth of the Orchestra*, 393.

³⁴ Spitzer and Zaslaw, *Birth of the Orchestra*, 373.

³⁵ Arnold, *Der angehende Musikdirektor*, 35.

³⁶ J.H. Plumb, *The Commercialisation of Leisure in Eighteenth Century England* (Reading: University of Reading, 1973), 19.

recruiting players, booking soloists, publishing, managing the box office, negotiating leases and contracts, advertising performances, designing and building sets – were becoming professionalised. The wider range of musical events required more and larger concert venues, the acoustics of which demanded larger orchestras. Whereas Haydn's *Creation* required only 20 players at Eszterhaza, 50 were needed at the Vienna Festival Hall, 100 at the *Burgtheater* and nearly 150 at the *Théâtre des Arts* in Paris.³⁷

Despite these pressures, there was remarkably little theoretical discussion of the need for change in the early decades of the century.³⁸ The first significant works on the theory of orchestral performance were by Fétis (1827/8), who favoured violin-leading, and Kastner (1839), who advocated that a non-playing violinist should direct.³⁹ But all three later came down in favour of baton- or bow-conducting.⁴⁰

3.2 Practice in England

By the time of Costa's arrival in London, it was becoming obvious that larger orchestras, playing more complex music in bigger halls, needed clearer leadership in order to galvanise the players, set the balance of tone and volume between them and obey the increasingly detailed dynamics that composers were writing into their scores. This challenged the roles of leader, *maestro* and Musical Director, none of whom could fully meet these needs.

³⁷ Spitzer and Zaslaw, *Birth of the Orchestra*, 369.

³⁸ Southon 'L'émergence de la figure de chef d'orchestre', 348.

³⁹ Fétis, 'De l'exécution musicale', *Revue Musicale*, 1827-8. Kastner, *Cours d'Instrumentation* (Paris: 1839, Meissonnier et Heugel).

⁴⁰ Fétis, *Manuel des compositeurs* 1837; Kastner, *Supplement to Cours d'Orchestration* (1844); and Berlioz, *Supplement to Traité* (1855).

London had bigger audiences than elsewhere and offered a more diversified range of musical products. With the Exeter Hall (1831 – 3,000 seats), the Crystal Palace (1854 – 29,000 seats), the St James’s Hall (1865 – 2,000 seats) and the Albert Hall (1871 – 8,000 seats), London was better provided with venues than any other capital. The relative weakness of royal and church patronage in England gave added importance to the public concert. The programmes put on by the Ancients (from 1776), J.C. Bach/Abel (1765-82), and in the following two decades by the Professional Concert, Salomon, the Pantheon and the Opera institutionalised the public concert, which was arguably ‘an English invention’.⁴¹

But London, isolated culturally by the Revolutionary Wars, moved slowly to catch up with the orchestral changes that were occurring on the Continent. Although it had more standing theatre orchestras than any other city in the late eighteenth century, none had more than 50 players, whereas there were 7 orchestras of this size in France, 6 in Germany and 5 in Italy.⁴² In terms of conducting, too, England was slow to modernise. The conservatism of the English musical scene was reinforced by the absence of any prominent indigenous composers or conductors who could lead the cause of reform. England’s unsubsidised music market encouraged perverse economies. At Drury Lane, the violinist Tom Cooke functioned as ‘the Director of the Music, leader of the orchestra and actor for the role of second tenor, when there is one’.⁴³

With much of London’s music dominated by foreigners, musical structures drew heavily on the models that prevailed on the Continent. At the Italian Opera, the orchestra was

41 Simon McVeigh, ‘The Professional Concert and Rival Subscription Series in London, 1783-1793’, *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle*, No. 22 (1989), 1-135. Peter Holman ‘The British Isles: Private and Public Music’ in *Companion to Baroque Music* (New York: 1990), 266.

42 Spitzer and Zaslaw, *Birth of the Orchestra*, 317-9.

43 Fétis, *Curiosités Historiques de la Musique* (Paris: 1830), 250.

‘presided over’ by the *maestro al cembalo* or the Musical Director, but ‘led’ by the violinist Spagnoletti, who acted as intermediary between management and orchestra.⁴⁴ One of the objections to Laporte’s 1829 Regulations was that ‘the leader of the band is deprived of his legitimate power by not having been permitted to have a voice in choosing the band over which he is to preside and for which the leader is responsible’.⁴⁵ In the concert hall, insofar as there was a general rule, the *Maestro* or Musical Director led rehearsals and performance was steered by the violin-leader.

The term ‘conductor’ was the subject of the same confusion as on the Continent. It often applied to the *maestro al cembalo* or Musical Director, though it sometimes referred to the leader or the person who set the programme, as when the Earl of Darnley ‘conducted’ the Ancient Concert in April 1829.⁴⁶ It could also refer to the organist, the first violin in a quartet, the accompanist at the piano or even the chairman of a song-and-supper club. At the Italian Opera, Coccia was listed as ‘composer and conductor’ in 1825 and as presiding ‘at the piano-forte...as *Maestro*’ in 1826.⁴⁷ Mendelssohn described the violinist Spagnoletti as the ‘conductor’ there in 1829.⁴⁸ At the Philharmonic, where the roles of leader and Director ‘at the pianoforte’ were kept distinct, the title ‘conductor’ replaced ‘at the pianoforte’ in 1820 and the pianoforte itself was replaced in the following year by a desk in front of the orchestra.⁴⁹ The *QMMR* in 1828 laid down that the ‘conductor’s’ role was to make sure that the scores were ‘distinctly arranged’ and to advise on ‘nice points’, but not to choose the singers or

44 Spagnoletti-Ayrton (1821), Cowgill and Diedrichsen, ‘Opera orchestras in Georgian and early Victorian London’, Appendix iii.

45 *Harmonicon*, vol. VI, no. 2 (Feb. 1828), 48.

46 Eric Werner, *Mendelssohn: A new image* (New York: 1963), 138.

47 *Harmonicon*, vol. VI, no. 3 (March 1825), 47 and no. 11 (Nov. 1826), 250.

48 Hensel, *The Mendelssohn Family*, trans. Klingemann (London: 1882), vol. 1, 180.

49 Hogarth, *Philharmonic Society*, 26-7.

programme.⁵⁰ But the labels remained ambiguous. In 1843, the *ILN* listed as the Philharmonic's 'conductors' Tom Cooke (a violin-leader), Henry Bishop (a composer-arranger), Moscheles (a pianist) and Smart (an old-style Musical Director) (Figs 3.4/6).⁵¹

This confusion over the role of the 'conductor' prompted Moscheles to ask Clementi (who himself 'presided at the pianoforte'): 'What do they mean by the term

Conductor?'⁵² A letter to *The Harmonicon* in 1831 expressed the same perplexity:

Why, if one of those stuffed figures which the wardrobe of the King's Theatre could supply were to be placed in the conductor's chair, the business would go on just as well as now. There is a great deal of *humbug*, Mr Editor, in conducting, but nowhere is it arrived at so high a pitch as at the Philharmonic concerts.⁵³

'Conductor' was still an imprecise term in 1851, when it was boasted that all the talented players of the Philharmonic were 'capable of conducting an orchestra'.⁵⁴ It is clear from reports around 1830 that conducting did not normally imply active leadership during the performance, which rested with the leader. George Smart was billed as 'conductor' in 1829, when Mendelssohn saw him merely sitting at the piano and turning the pages.⁵⁵ Moscheles described a Philharmonic performance in 1821 as being 'under the direction' of Kiesewetter (the violinist-leader) rather than George Smart the 'conductor'.⁵⁶ Even Mendelssohn had to share the honours with the leader. One of his

⁵⁰ *QMMR* (vol. 8, no. XXX), 438-9.

⁵¹ *ILN* (24 June 1843), 439.

⁵² Moscheles, *Life* (London: 1873), vol. 1, 76.

⁵³ *Harmonicon*, vol. IX, no. 2 (Feb. 1831), 35.

⁵⁴ J Wheale, *London and its Vicinity Exhibited in 1851* (1851), 62.

⁵⁵ Foster, *History of the Philharmonic*, 6. The Mendelssohn quote is in Todd, *Mendelssohn a Life in Music* (Oxford: 2003), 206.

⁵⁶ Moscheles, *Life*, vol. 1, 56.

last concerts was ‘conducted by Mendelssohn, and led by T. Cooke (who, by the way, conducted to more than half of the effect by his precise and steady leadership)’.⁵⁷



Figs 3.4/6 Three early London ‘conductors’ Sir George Smart (1776-67), Sir Henry Bishop (1786-1855) and Ignaz Moscheles (1794-1870).

The dominance of the leader during performances was reinforced by the presence at his side of the legendary bass-cello partnership of Dragonetti and Lindley, who helped to transmit his tempi to the rest of the band. A King’s Theatre concert bill for 1833 listed both leaders (Spagnoletti and Mori) before the ‘conductor’ (Smart).⁵⁸ Moscheles observed that the man at the piano ‘sits there and turns the leaves of the score, but after all he cannot, without his marshal’s staff the baton, lead on his musical army. The leader does this and the conductor remains a nullity’.⁵⁹ The influence of the Musical Director was further weakened as his composing duties waned. In 1828, the impresario Ebers pronounced that ‘a composer of operas is an unnecessary part of the establishment’.⁶⁰

Spohr (Fig. 3.9) provides a vivid description from his visit in 1820:

⁵⁷ *ILN* (13 July 1844), 32.

⁵⁸ King’s Theatre concert bill of 17 May 1833.

⁵⁹ Moscheles, *Life*, vol. 1, 76.

⁶⁰ Ebers, *Seven Years at the King’s Theatre*, 363.

The way of conducting here, both in the opera house and at concerts, is the most topsy-turvy one imaginable. They have two conductors, but neither really functions. The ‘Conductor’, as he is styled on the bills, sits at the piano and plays from the full score, but gives neither the beat nor the tempo. This is supposed to be done by the ‘leader’ or first violin; but, as he has only the first violin part in front of him, he can’t be of any help to the orchestra, so he contents himself with emphasising his own part and letting the orchestra keep with him as best it can.⁶¹

A similar confusion prevailed through the 1830s and 40s at the Societa Armonica, the Ancient Concert and the Sacred Harmonic Society (Chapter 8).⁶²

During the next thirty years, this mixed structure – biased in favour of the violin-leader – gave way to centralised control by a non-playing conductor. Some of the main impulses were those that prompted change in Germany – the declining role of the cembalo/pianoforte; the expansion of orchestras; the demands of composers for better ensemble playing and closer attention to dynamics. Under these pressures, the coexistence of leader and *maestro al cembalo* led to unseemly incompatibilities:

In every English orchestra, we find a leader and a conductor, one of which is manifestly useless. The wisdom of our ancestors has posted one man on a joint-stool to direct an orchestra, if he can, and another a little higher up to overturn all his arrangements, if he likes, and thus bequeathed to us an intolerable absurdity. Down goes the conductor’s baton, ditto the heel of the leader’s boot – perhaps simultaneously, perhaps not as the case may be.⁶³

The music journals, which proliferated from the 1820s, became an important part of the debate. *The Harmonicon* and the *Musical World* joined the *Athenaeum* in publicly ridiculing ‘the triple authority of beating time’ at the Opera.⁶⁴ The *Musical World* announced that: ‘The spectacle of a conductor and leader combating for the direction of

⁶¹ Spohr-Speyer (17 April 1820), In E. Speyer, *Wilhelm Speyer*, 51.

⁶² On Societa Armonica, *MW* (14 June 1838), 112. Other examples in Carse, *Beethoven to Berlioz*, 330. On Ancient Concert, *MW* (10 March 1837), 187 and *ILN*, (24 June 1843), 439.

⁶³ *MW* (26 March 1840), 186.

⁶⁴ *Athenaeum* (18 Feb. 1832), 116.

the band can no longer be tolerated'.⁶⁵ As the mechanics of musical direction became more conspicuous, the mistakes of its practitioners were more exposed to censure and ridicule. William Knyvett, who 'conducted' the Ancient Concert from 1832-39, was advised that the roles of organist and conductor were incompatible.⁶⁶ Sterndale Bennett was mocked for conducting the Philharmonic 'in German time, while his subjects executed in English tempo'.⁶⁷ Bishop was lampooned for doing his utmost to prevent the leader (Loder) from 'sometimes escaping into the right tempo'.⁶⁸ It was public ridicule as much as his own inadequacy that led Bishop to give up conducting the Philharmonic in 1845 (Chapter 8).

There were attempts to resolve the confusion by defining more clearly the respective functions of the *maestro* and the leader. The critic George Hogarth, looking back thirty years later, wrote that the leader's job had been to give a firm lead and 'attend to all the other performers who were to look to him for the time of the movements and to be governed by his beat'; his 'coadjutor at the pianoforte', with the full score before him, was to 'watch the performance and to be ready to correct any mistake'. But Hogarth observed that the leader could not execute his own part properly and beat time for the whole band; while the person at the pianoforte, though very useful at rehearsal, 'could scarcely exercise any influence over the "going" of the performance without coming into collision with the leader'.⁶⁹ The *Musical World* concluded in 1839 that redefinition of functions was not the remedy. 'The exact boundary distinguishing the provinces of

⁶⁵ *MW* (21 June 1838), 133.

⁶⁶ *MW* (20 May 1836), 159 and (10 March 1837), 187.

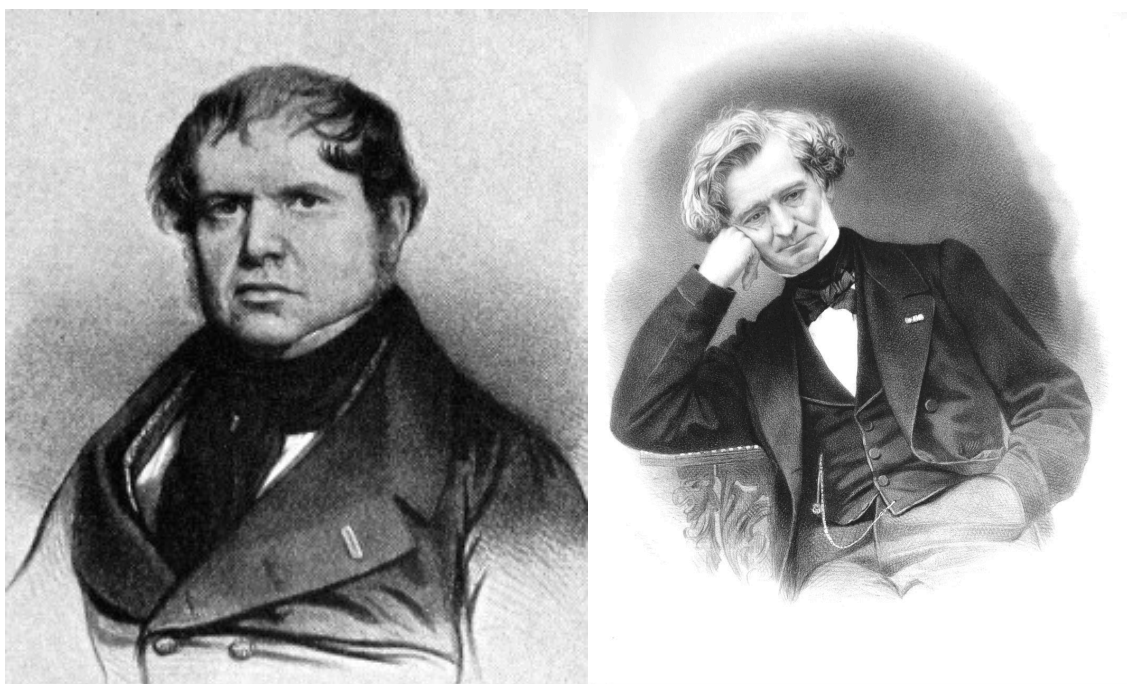
⁶⁷ *Athenaeum* (21 May 1842), 460.

⁶⁸ *Athenaeum* (5 April 1845), 338.

⁶⁹ Hogarth, *Philharmonic Society*, 8-9.

‘leader’ and ‘conductor’ [remains] as little defined as the disputed territory in America...’⁷⁰

The critics pointed out tellingly that this split arrangement discredited English music since it could not do justice to the works of Beethoven, Spohr, Meyerbeer and Mendelssohn. Bishop and Loder’s mismanagement of a Philharmonic concert with Liszt and Molique present ‘made our ears tingle and our cheeks burn’.⁷¹ As late as 1840, the *Musical World* judged that ‘Orchestral performance...will never reach perfection in England until the office of leader...be definitely abolished and the conductor invested



Figs 3.7/8 Two leading propagandists of the new conducting: the musicologist François-Joseph Fétis (1784-1871) and Hector Berlioz.

with unshackled authority’.⁷² Another potent argument was the claim that baton-conducting required fewer rehearsals. The *Morning Post* applauded ‘the perfect

⁷⁰ *MW* (11 April 1839), 231.

⁷¹ *Athenaeum* (16 May 1840), 403.

⁷² *MW* (26 March 1840), 186.

execution of *Der Freischütz* at the King's Theatre in 1832 with only three rehearsals, conducted by Herr Scheland [Chéland]'.⁷³

One of the most influential voices in the journals was that of the critic François-Joseph Fétis (Fig. 3.7), who criticised the lay-out of English orchestras after visiting London in 1829:

The arrangement...seems to be made on purpose to prevent the performers from seeing and hearing one another. The basses are in front, the first violins behind them, the second above them in a sort of gallery...in fact there is no unity, no plan. The leader of the orchestra, placed in front and facing the audience cannot see the musicians whom he directs.⁷⁴

Fétis argued that the best position for direction was 'in front of the stage, and a little behind the centre of the musicians, as it enables him at a single glance to see both the singers and the orchestra'. Three years after Fétis' visit, the *Athenaeum* took up the same theme: it was not surprising that the the brass at the extremities of the Philharmonic performed so tamely when 'the leaders play and conductors beat time where they cannot be seen'.⁷⁵

English visitors sent back from the Continent idealised accounts of better ways of performing the new repertoire. Edward Holmes reported from Germany in 1828 that a baton conductor:

placed on an elevation in the front of the orchestra, gives the cue to all, very properly setting aside the offices of leader, chorus director etc, which in England frequently causes the band and singers to be wandering in different directions.⁷⁶

A *Harmonicon* correspondent from Berlin highlighted the advantages of Spontini's single control, compared with the London system of 'two distinct beats...one being

⁷³ *Morning Post* (1832), quoted in *Musical Times*, vol. 37, No. 640 (1 June 1896), 372-5.

⁷⁴ Fétis, *Music Explained to the World* (London: Clarke, 1844), 240-1 and 249.

⁷⁵ *Athenaeum* (5 May 1832), 292.

⁷⁶ E Holmes, *A Ramble Among the Musicians of Germany* (London: 1828), 38.

clapped by the hands of the conductor and the other being stamped, sometimes furiously, with the foot of the first violinist or leader'.⁷⁷ The *Athenaeum* stressed the theme that 'the sight of the magic little wand, in efficient hands, controls a band more quietly and effectively than all the beating, stamping and ejaculations of 'Mein Gott...'⁷⁸

But the remedy went beyond baton-conducting. The message from the Continent was that the key lay in how the baton was actually used and in wider issues of discipline. 'In Germany, France etc...the discipline of bands is considered of more importance than in England'.⁷⁹

3.3 The Composer-conductors

Significant pressure for change came from the most prominent composers. Their contracts often specified that they should, in the words of the Philharmonic's invitation to Beethoven in 1815, 'superintend the production' of a work before handing over to the leader or the *maestro al cembalo*. Many composers were also *Kappelmeister* and combined the two roles automatically. In the early nineteenth-century, a new generation of composer-conductors emerged – authoritative figures like Spontini in Berlin, Weber in Dresden and Spohr on a wider circuit. Together with the next generation (Mendelssohn, Berlioz, Wagner, Schumann and Liszt), they dominated the international circuit. Although they secured their appointments as composers rather than as conductors, most were highly competent, especially in conducting their own works.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ *Harmonicon*, vol. VIII, no. 1 (Jan. 1830), 5.

⁷⁸ *Athenaeum* (11 Feb. 1832), 101.

⁷⁹ *Morning Post* (27 May 1829).

⁸⁰ The main exceptions were Beethoven and Schumann, who were indifferent conductors.

Many, like Wagner, had a clear orchestral reform agenda, as in his 1848 Memorandum to the Dresden authorities *Concerning the Royal Orchestra*.⁸¹

A major reason for their prestige as conductors was that they embodied the creative intelligence behind their compositions and, in the absence of definitive performing editions, could give authoritative performances of them. At a Philharmonic concert taken jointly by Costa and Mendelssohn in 1847, it was judged that, although Costa was admirable, Mendelssohn conveyed ‘all the modifications of feeling that an imaginary soloist would give tongue to on a single instrument’.⁸² The special status of composer-conductors was apparent in the high salary (£200) that the Philharmonic paid to Spohr in 1820. They demanded moral authority (to ensure that their scores would not be tampered with) and executive authority (to achieve the more complex dynamics that their increasingly complicated scores required). Significantly, two of the greatest composer-conductors, Berlioz and Wagner, were influential theoreticians of conducting; the English translation of Berlioz *Grande Traité* was in its third edition by 1858.⁸³

Although many composers conducted extensively beyond the end of the century, the dominance of the composer-conductor was short-lived. Kastner claimed that conducting required special skills which many composers lacked.⁸⁴ The composition of more elaborate scores left less time for even assiduous travellers like Berlioz or Liszt to visit the growing number of musical centres in Europe to ensure that their works were performed as they wished. Instead, they wrote more precise instructions into their scores

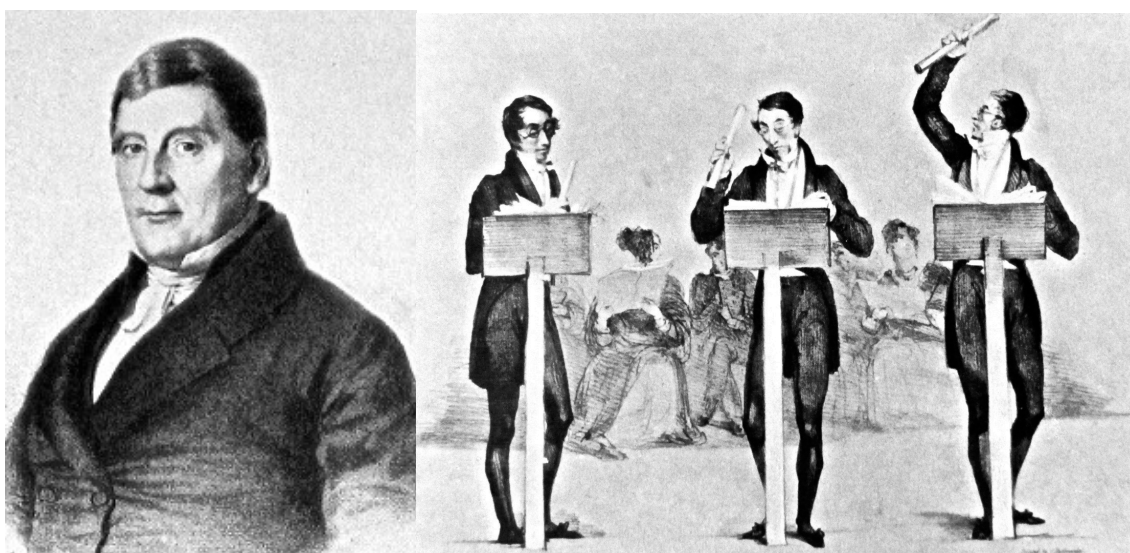
81 Edward Devrient, *Aus seinen Tagebüchern*, ed. Kabel (Weimar: 1848), vol. 1, 422. Cited in Joachim Kohler, *Richard Wagner, The Last of the Titans* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2004), 214.

82 *Times* (26 April 1847).

83 Berlioz, *Grand Traité d'Instrumentation et d'Orchestration Modernes* (Paris: 1843) and Wagner, *Über das Dirigieren* (1870).

84 Kastner, *Manuel générale de musique militaire* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1848) cited by Southon, ‘L’émergence de la figure de chef d’orchestre’, 358.

and mainly contented themselves with ensuring that initial performances set a standard for later ones. In the longer term, their legacy was to strengthen the case for a new type of conductor, who specialised in performances of *other people's* works. This favoured the Musical Director, since it was through him rather than through leaders that composers tended to transmit their instructions (as Beethoven, for example, did through Moscheles and Smart).



Figs 3.9/10 Two influential composer-conductors: Louis Spohr (1759-1854) and Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826).

In London, in the absence of a competent English model, the benefits of central control were demonstrated mainly by visiting composer-conductors. Spohr claimed in his *Autobiography* (1865) that he definitively established baton-conducting at the Philharmonic in April 1820:

At the morning rehearsal...I took my stand with a score at a separate music-desk in front of the orchestra, drew my directing baton from my coat pocket and gave the signal to begin. Quite alarmed at such a novel procedure, some of the Directors would have protested against it; but, when I besought them to grant me at least one trial, they became pacified...the triumph of the baton as a time-giver was decisive and no one was seen again seated at the pianoforte during the performance of symphonies and overtures.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Louis Spohr: *Autobiography* (London: Longman, 1865), vol. 2, 81-2.

This account, written long after the event, has been convincingly dismissed.⁸⁶ Spohr appears to have used the baton at the rehearsal; he wrote at the time that he ‘conducted in the old-established way from the score in the evening, when it is *de rigueur* for the conductor to be at the piano.’⁸⁷ At his benefit concert two months later, he led as violinist, with George Smart at the pianoforte.⁸⁸ But Spohr does seem at times to have stood on a rostrum facing the orchestra ‘in a very novel and superior manner’, asserting his authority over the advertised ‘conductor’ (Thomas Attwood) in a way described as ‘unwelcome to many’ and unnecessary for experienced players.⁸⁹ On his return to the Philharmonic in 1843, Spohr was listed as ‘conductor’ and for the first time no leader was named.⁹⁰ Spohr did not, as he claimed, revolutionise English orchestral habits; but he contributed eloquently to the mood for change and, by his own example, provided a glimpse of the future.

The other influential early exponent was Weber (Fig. 3.10), who appears like Spohr to have directed in several different ways. In London in 1826 he was described as conducting the Philharmonic ‘in the old manner, standing in front and giving the time with a roll of paper’ and as ‘facing the audience with a baton in his hand, with which he gave the time to the orchestra’.⁹¹ At a concert in the Argyll Rooms, he was seen ‘marking the time with his usual animation’ in the Overture to *Euryanthe*.⁹²

⁸⁶ Arthur Jacobs in *Music and Letters*, vol. xxxi (1950), 307-17.

⁸⁷ Spohr-Speyer (17 April 1820).

⁸⁸ *Times* (18 June 1820).

⁸⁹ *Morning Chronicle* (4 May 1820). *Allgemeine Musik Zeitung* (1820), 744.

⁹⁰ Foster, *History*, 181.

⁹¹ ‘State of Music in London’, *QMMR* (vol. 8, no. XXX), 145. *Harmonicon*, vol. IV, no. 40 (April 1826), 40.

⁹² *Morning Post* (10 April 1826).

The librettist of *Oberon*, Planché, recorded that, during a rehearsal in 1826, Weber stood in the pit (the stalls), leaning on the back of the orchestra (today's pit), and had to leap over the partition to intervene and correct an error. On another occasion, Weber 'snatched the baton from the conductor' in order to make a point.⁹³ The *Morning Post* reported that, for the premiere, he 'entered the orchestra *with the other instrumental performers* and took his seat at the piano'.⁹⁴ This accords with the Covent Garden playbill announcing that he would preside in the orchestra.⁹⁵ Weber offered a model that was still in transition. He often conducted facing the audience and sometimes simply beat the tempo for a few bars before leaving the field to the orchestra.⁹⁶ But he clearly achieved results: Cox recalled him 'throwing his whole heart and soul into the work, imparting a stimulus to principals, band and chorus such as they had never experienced before'.⁹⁷

The most potent model in England – for concert and choral music, though not for opera – was Mendelssohn (Fig. 3.11), though (as with other early composer-conductors such as Spontini and Spohr), his illustrations show him as a composer rather than as a conductor. Like Weber, he was not an intrusive conductor, sometimes simply giving the opening tempo and standing half-facing the orchestra.⁹⁸ He initially seems to have preferred to conduct from the piano or the viola desk and did not take over full

93 J. R. Planché, *Recollections and Reflections* (London: Sampson and Low, 1901), 56 and 81.

94 *Morning Post* (13 April 1826).

95 Playbill printed in John Warrack, *Carl Maria von Weber* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1868), 330.

96 *Harmonicon*, vol. IV, no. 40 (April 1826), 85. Confirmed by Schumann in Dorffel, *Geschichte der Gewandhausconcerte zu Leipzig* (Leipzig: 1884), 85 and Berlioz, *Memoirs*, 306.

97 Cox, *Musical Recollections*, vol. I, 132.

98 Edward Devrient, *My Recollections*, vol. 2, 59. Julius Benedict, *Sketch of the Life and Works of the Late Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy* (London: 1850), 24-6.

command of the Leipzig orchestra until 1835, when it was described as ‘a new and desirable plan.’⁹⁹ He appears to have used a baton first at the Philharmonic in 1829, when he rehearsed his First Symphony ‘with my white stick, which I have had made on purpose...’ At the actual performance, he was ‘led to the pianoforte like a young lady’ by the first violin, François Cramer, and directed his symphony from there,



Fig. 3.11 Mendelssohn, the most influential composer-conductor in England.

‘with a baton, as is customary in Germany’. But the other ten items in the programme seem to have been ‘conducted’ by J.B. Cramer and the concert as a whole was led by François Cramer.¹⁰⁰

During his 1832 visit, Mendelssohn was anxious not to offend the ‘conductor’, Thomas Attwood. Ella claimed that Mendelssohn was persuaded by himself, Costa and Meyerbeer to conduct the performance using a baton, only to be met by ‘the frowns of the fiddlers whose authority Mendelssohn’s baton so completely usurped’.¹⁰¹ Even Mendelssohn’s prestige did not give him undisputed authority at the Philharmonic. He was still in competition with the leader, who signalled the start of the final work in his

⁹⁹ Schubring’s *Reminiscences*, cited by Larry Todd, *Mendelssohn and his World*, 228. *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* (14 Oct. 1835).

¹⁰⁰ Mendelssohn-Fanny (26 May 1829), ed. Henschel, *The Mendelssohn Family (1729-1847): Letters and Journals*, vol. 1, 184. *Morning Post* (27 May 1829).

¹⁰¹ Ella, *Supplement to Musical Union Record* (11 June 1867), quoted in *Musical Times*, vol. 37, No. 640 (1 June 1896), 372-5.

1833 concert while Mendelssohn was still offstage.¹⁰² But his nine visits to London, especially his five concerts at the Philharmonic in 1844, gave authoritative backing to the use of the baton.

3.4 The Entrepreneur-conductors



Figs 3.12/13 Philippe Musard (1792-1859), the 'Napoleon of the Gavotte', and Louis Jullien (1812-60).

The other influential model during the period of transition was what John Spitzer has termed the entrepreneur-conductor, typified by Johann Strauss in Vienna, Musard in Paris and Jullien in London.¹⁰³ Their programmes appealed to a wider audience by offering spectacle and glamour at low prices. But all were trained musicians and their musical standards and programme content were often high. 'Napoleon' Musard (Fig. 3.12) was a former Conservatoire prize-winner and his Paris concerts from 1833 to 1840 deployed 90 players, many from the Conservatoire.

¹⁰² *Atlas* (19 May 1833), 325.

¹⁰³ J Spitzer, 'The Entrepreneur Conductors and their Orchestras', *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, vol. 5, Issue 1 (2008).

The new fashion for promenade concerts hit London in 1838. The *Musical World* announced that:

the success of Musard's concerts in Paris and the increasing taste for music in England has induced Mr Pilati to undertake the establishment of a series of instrumental concerts for the performance of overtures, quadrilles, waltzes and gallops, so arranged as to offer a promenade between the acts.¹⁰⁴

Pilati included several leading players from the Italian Opera in his 60-strong orchestra.

As the fashion caught on, the next year saw at least seven prom-style concerts.¹⁰⁵ In

1840, a series at the Crown and Anchor featured the violinist Louis Jullien (Fig. 3.13), who was to become the archetypical entrepreneur-conductor in England.

Jullien offered competent popular-classical programmes by up to 80 players for a shilling or half a crown, at a time when the Philharmonic was also providing mixed programmes (without the polkas and gavottes) with a smaller band for half a guinea. As an entrepreneur, he ran his players as employees in a commercial venture, marketing musical performances as a product. He was an erratic businessman, veering between profitability and the bailiffs, but showed remarkable resilience over 21 seasons. He was denounced as a charlatan by many in the musical establishment, for his posturing and extravagant self-promotion. His audiences were criticised as indiscriminating and occasionally rowdy. But Jullien employed many of the best players from the Opera and briefly hired Berlioz to conduct in 1848. By the time he died in 1860, bankrupt in a French lunatic asylum, he had persuaded his 'vast promiscuous assemblage' to listen in 'profound silence and earnest attention' to programmes devoted to Mozart, Beethoven and Mendelssohn.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ *MW* (2 Feb. 1838), 74 and (5 March 1838), 764.

¹⁰⁵ Details in William Weber, *Great Transformation of Musical Taste*.

¹⁰⁶ *ILN* (27 Jan. 1855), 88.



Fig. 3.14 Jullien conducting (in the midst of his orchestra) at a Covent Garden concert (1846).

Jullien brought enterprise and showmanship, combining features of the earlier Vauxhall/Ranelagh pleasure gardens with the growing taste for a mixed diet of arias, solos, quadrilles and symphonic works on a grand scale at cheap prices. His qualities as a conductor were his energy, power of communication (to the audience as well as the band) and ability to combine the popular with the serious. Chorley conceded that he had ‘a genuine enthusiasm...for what was good’.¹⁰⁷ The author Edmund Yates commented that ‘as a musician he was perhaps the greatest benefactor this country ever had’.¹⁰⁸ Davison praised him frequently, describing him as ‘a refiner of public taste’. Jullien’s work as a populist pioneered the way for more conventional conductors, especially August Manns at the Crystal Palace and Charles Halle in Manchester.

¹⁰⁷ Chorley, *Musical Recollections*, 320.

¹⁰⁸ Edmund Yates, *His Recollections and Experiences* (London: Bentley, 1884), 182.

The other legacy of the entrepreneur-conductors was that they helped to establish the conductor as the authoritative centrepiece of the orchestra and a box office draw in his own right. They developed the notion of the conductor as manager and performer, anticipating the later model of the virtuoso-conductor. But they were not structural reformers in the same sense as Costa. Although Jullien used the baton from about 1840, he continued to adopt an old-fashioned lay-out and to conduct, mainly facing the audience, from the middle of the orchestra, as did Musard (Fig. 3.14).

3.5 The Beginnings of Reform in England

By 1840, various models of musical control had been demonstrated in London by Spohr (1820), Weber (1826), Mendelssohn (1829-47), Chélaré (1832), Hummel (1833), Strauss (1838) and Musard (1840).¹⁰⁹ But there was no authoritative London-based conductor capable of drawing on these ideas to achieve what Habeneck was doing in Paris, Mendelssohn in Leipzig or Lindpainter in Dresden. Elements of continental practice were applied experimentally by London-based conductors. George Smart conducted the Handel Commemoration in 1834, ‘at a desk...not playing himself but beating time with a baton’, with the organist and leader invisible.¹¹⁰ But this was a one-off event and Smart did not apply this approach at Victoria’s chaotic coronation in 1838.¹¹¹

Smart and Bishop used a baton sporadically at the Philharmonic from 1833 and Bishop is recorded as doing so at Drury Lane in 1838.¹¹² But it is an exaggeration to assert that baton-conducting ‘became the rule’ from then on, as a recent biographer claims, that

¹⁰⁹ The powerful examples set by Chélaré and Strauss are described in the next chapter.

¹¹⁰ Mount Edgecumbe, *Musical Reminiscences* (London: John Andrews, 1834), 232.

¹¹¹ Carse, *Beethoven to Berlioz*, 325. For details see chapter 8.

¹¹² *Athenaeum* reviews of March 1833, quoted in *Musical Times* (1 June 1896), 372-5. *MW* (4 Oct. 1838), 69.

Smart was ‘instrumental in the introduction of baton-conducting’.¹¹³ The *Musical World* commented in 1838 on the contrast between Strauss, who galvanised the players from the centre of the orchestra, and the Philharmonic ‘conductors’, who often sat facing the audience or retreated ‘into an obscure corner’.¹¹⁴ It later lampooned these ‘semi-conductors’ (Smart, Bishop, Potter, Neate, Moscheles) with their ‘differences of opinion and still greater varieties of method...doing all that clever men and a bad system could possibly accomplish to to banish every prospect of unity of effect and solid improvement in the orchestra.’¹¹⁵ The first edition of Grove described how ‘in former times the chief musician sat at a pianoforte in the orchestra with the score before him; but it does not appear that he beat time continuously or in any way influenced the band...The leader it was who kept the band together – or as nearly together as possible.’¹¹⁶

The introduction of baton-conducting in incapable hands probably aggravated the problem of divided control. As late as 1844 the soloist at one Philharmonic concert was reported to be:

fettered by the discordant beatings of no less than three different individuals, viz – Sir George Smart, who wielded the baton – Mr Loder, the leader for the evening – and Mr T Cooke, *not* the leader for the evening. These gentlemen were all beating different times, and the consequence was that the band was bewildered.¹¹⁷

‘How often’, the *Musical World* asked in 1838, ‘do we witness a Conductor whose exertions are fully occupied in a continued struggle to catch the time which the band, or

113 Carse, Beethoven to Berlioz, 325. Carnelly, ‘Sir George Smart and the Evolution of British Musical Culture 1800–1840’ (Ph.D. diss., Goldsmiths College, University of London, 2008), 2.

114 *MW* (14 June 1838), 109.

115 *MW* (30 June 1855), 415-6 and (20 March 1852), 177.

116 Grove 1, vol. 1, 390.

117 *MW* (25 April 1844), 141.

singers, have fallen into?’¹¹⁸ Gruneisen was probably thinking of men like Smart and Bishop when he described conductors who merely followed the ‘swing’ of the orchestra instead of creating it.¹¹⁹ In the absence of a strong conductor with a clear baton technique and personal authority, the balance of power still favoured the leader. Part of the problem was that there was no standard manual on baton-conducting. Kastner wrote 14 instrumental ‘methods’ but nothing for the conductor; Habeneck wrote a manual for the violin but not for the chef; and Berlioz did not initially address this issue in his *Traité*.¹²⁰ Conducting in the modern sense was not regularised in England until Costa introduced it at the opera house in the mid-1830s and at the Philharmonic and the SHS in the late 1840s.

Moreover the baton by itself was not a panacea. Other pre-requisites of an effective conductor were also lacking. Bishop, Smart and Moscheles, who had spent their whole careers within the structure of divided control, still sat at the piano or stood in the middle of the orchestra facing the audience (Fig. 3.15). They had no continuity with the orchestras, which they directed on an ad hoc basis. They did not have the contractual power to select and discipline their musicians. They lacked the personality and baton technique to assert themselves over the leaders and players. Without a coherent model of conducting, they could not correct the many deficiencies of orchestral performance (indiscipline, imprecision, bad lay-out, poor rehearsal practice). Their fortes were elsewhere, as composers, arrangers and instrumentalists.

118 *MW* (12 April 1838), 241-2.

119 *Morning Post* (March 1846).

120 Southon, ‘L’émergence de la figure de chef d’orchestre’, 394.



Fig. 3.15 Philharmonic Concert at the Hanover Square in 1843. The conductor (Lucas) faces the audience.

Many musicians and critics had not only diagnosed the problem (divided leadership, lack of continuity and inept baton technique) but also the remedy (which Chorley defined as ‘undeviating discipline exercised by one master mind and one master hand’).¹²¹ Busby’s *Dictionary*, which had not defined the role of conductor in its 1806 edition, described him in 1840 as ‘one who arranges and superintends a public or private performance’ – whereas the leader was now redefined simply as ‘he who plays the first or principal violin in a concert’. At the same time, the label *maestro* (defined by Busby in 1806 as ‘the musician who has the direction and management of the performance’) gradually lost its technical meaning and was described in Busby’s 1840 reissue simply as ‘a master’. By 1838, when Costa was in undisputed charge as conductor at the opera, the *Musical World* reported that he was ‘as usual the

¹²¹ *Athenaeum* (5 June 1841), 446.

Maestro'.¹²²

With a range of new techniques already demonstrated and the theory to back them up gradually being developed, what was still missing in England was ‘a Cromwell...to take the reins of power’ – someone with the personality and authority to combine these new ideas into a system for controlling every aspect of performance.¹²³ Chapter 4 considers the system that Costa introduced to achieve this.

¹²² Ella, *Musical Sketches*, 133. *MW* (23 Feb. 1838), 130.

¹²³ *MW* (30 June 1855), 415-6.

Chapter 4: Costa's System

Chapter 3 examined how, when Costa arrived in London late in 1829, arrangements for controlling the orchestra were in flux. Lax habits persisted, in the audience as well as the orchestra. An illustration of Covent Garden in the period 1847-56 shows members of the audience still walking around and chatting during the performance (Fig. 4.1).

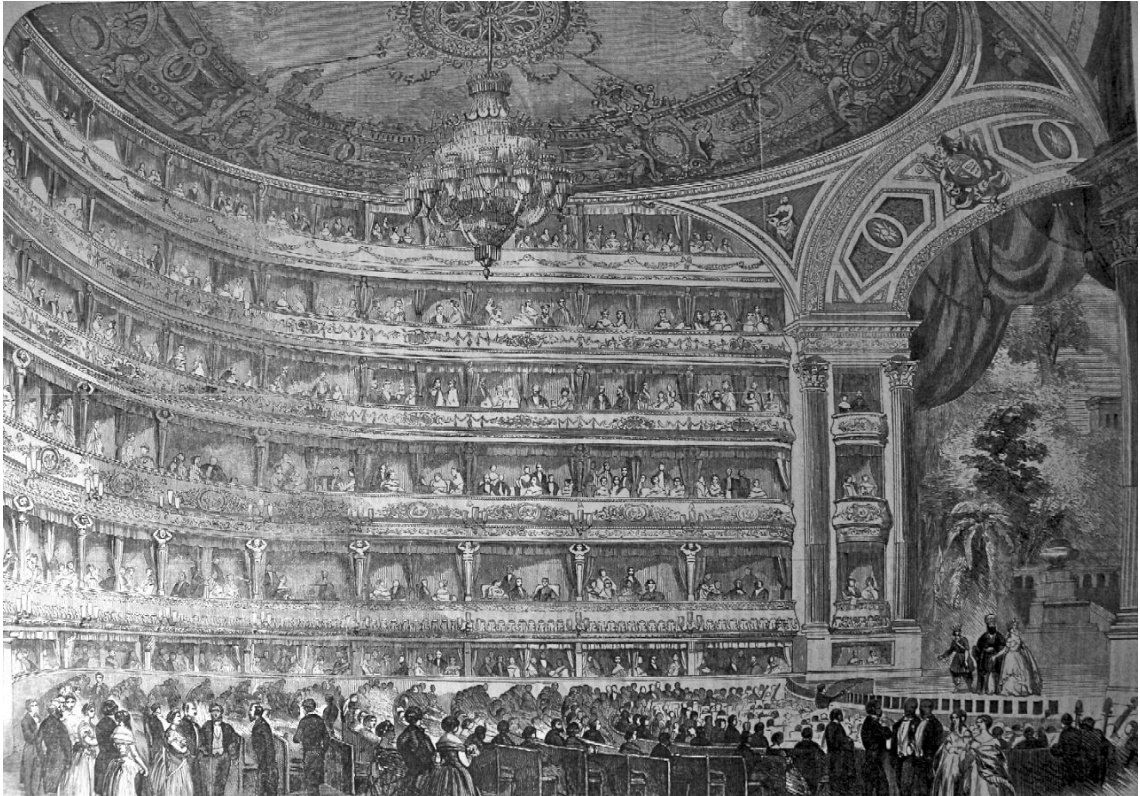


Fig. 4.1 Covent Garden before 1856, showing Costa with his back to the orchestra and half-attentive audience. (*ILN*, 6 Dec.1856, 562).

London-based ‘conductors’ were tentatively using the baton but still largely ceding control to the leader. This chapter describes the model that Costa imposed during his first twenty years in London. It involved the use of the baton, but its essence was the combination of many measures, ranging from contracts and pay-scales to rehearsal practice, orchestral lay-out and coordination of performances. Together they amounted to a new system operated by a new breed of professional conductor-manager, of which Costa was the London prototype.

It is paradoxical that such far-reaching changes were introduced at the opera, where there were advantages in leaving control of the band to the leader while the *maestro* or Musical Director played the continuo and cued the singers, whereas reform in Paris was pioneered in the concert hall.¹ One explanation is that, although Costa had no direct contact with progressive music centres on the Continent, he was able to observe at close quarters the conducting of visiting musicians familiar with some of the new techniques – Vaccai, Bellini and especially Chélaré. Another explanation lay in the new operatic repertoire. Works like *Der Freischütz*, *Guillaume Tell* and especially the operas of Meyerbeer demanded tighter integration of the complex variables – orchestra, singers, chorus and theatrical effects. Sir Charles Mackerras has observed that ‘an opera cannot even begin to be performed without a proper conductor directing the whole proceedings’, adding that it was a ‘great mystery’ that Mozart’s operas were put on at the time without a baton-conductor.²

The escalating cost of opera, by comparison with concerts or the spoken theatre, was a further powerful incentive to improve the efficiency of production if the larger houses were to survive in London’s competitive music market. But an important explanation lies in Costa himself: a man whose experience of mismanagement, insecurity and indiscipline during his first five years in London left him obsessed with the need for efficiency, order and authority. His long tenure as Musical Director over 47 years, under embattled and distracted managers, gave him a unique chance to introduce and embed his system.

His struggle to achieve this is not well documented. Conductors were rarely mentioned in contemporary accounts unless they were conspicuously awful. The manager Alfred

¹ Nicolas Southon, ‘L’émergence de la figure du chef d’orchestre’, 104.

² Charles Mackerras, ‘Opera conducting’, ed. Bowen, *Cambridge Companion to Conducting*, 65.

Bunn's lengthy memoirs barely acknowledge the existence of the orchestra and do not refer to the *maestro* or conductor. The build-up of a conductor's authority is a covert process, involving many intangible factors, minor skirmishes and invisible acts of personal assertion. Costa's authority at the opera no doubt grew with each success in asserting his will and disciplining incompetents. With Laporte distracted by legal and business problems, Costa was well placed to consolidate his position. Some of the key ingredients of Costa's system control – the management of the musicians, rehearsal practice, lay-out and coordination of performance - were implemented gradually over the period up to about 1850. These are considered in Section 4.2. But first it is necessary to examine the more visible and symbolic issue of the baton.

4.1 Costa's Reforms: Undivided Control and the Baton

Several writers, including Carse, have followed Chorley in assuming that 'Signor Costa took up the baton' in 1832.³ But Chorley's comment should be read as metaphorical. The significant change was not Costa's seizure of the baton – his predecessor Bochsa was criticised in 1829 for using 'a mopstick' to 'break time'⁴ – but his ability to use it effectively to assert undivided control over the musicians.

Chapters 2 and 3 described how harshly Chorley's predecessor and other critics denounced the musical set-up at the King's in the period 1832-5. At the start of the 1832 season, the *Athenaeum* remarked with regret that 'out of friendship for his friend Spagnoletti, Mr Mason has *denied himself the honour of introducing the system of leading with the baton.*'⁵ The old style of divided control was clearly still in force when

³ Carse, *Beethoven to Berlioz*, 171. Chorley, *Musical Recollections*, 84. Stephen Johnson, 'The English Tradition', ed. Bowen *Cambridge Companion to Conducting*, 178.

⁴ *Harmonicon*, vol. VII, no. 3 (March 1829), 70

⁵ *Athenaeum* (11 Feb. 1832), 101.

‘the numberless blunders committed drove the conductor to the piano in the hope of taming down their wild irregularities’.⁶ The *Athenaeum* criticised ‘the Gran Maestro Signor Costa’ for competing with the ‘prompter’, who had ‘entire control over the choristers’, and ‘the leader with his long bow moving in the air like the telegraph at the Admiralty’, while the bass-player Dragonetti laboured to prop up the tottering fabric.⁷

Some visiting composers exercised undivided control when directing their own works. It is not clear whether Bellini conducted in the modern sense when he undertook the ‘direction’ of *Norma* in 1833.⁸ But when Vaccai conducted his *Giulietta é Romeo*, ‘nothing but the strenuous and maestro-like conducting of the composer in the orchestra could have kept the performers together’.⁹



Fig. 4.2 Hippolyte Chéard (1789-1861).

A more significant example was set by Hippolyte Chéard (Fig. 4.2), who conducted a German troupe which performed at the King’s in 1832 in parallel with Mason’s company. The *Morning Post* reported that ‘Herr Chéard, a distinguished musician and disciplinarian, conducted the band with a baton, on the principle so often advocated in our notices of the Philharmonic concerts.’ The *Spectator* noticed that ‘The conductor with his baton, instead of sitting at the pianoforte, stood on a conspicuous elevation,

⁶ *Athenaeum* (3 March 1832), 148.

⁷ *Athenaeum* (18 Feb. 1832), 116.

⁸ Giuseppe Pasta-Rachele Negri, M.F. Giulini, *Giuditta Pasta e suoi tempi* (Milan: 1935), 166.

⁹ *Athenaeum* (14 April 1832), 244.

seeing and being seen by every person in the orchestra.’¹⁰ In Chélaré’s own *Macbeth*, he coaxed the King’s Theatre band with his *baton de mesure* to play ‘with spirit and precision’, that ‘surpassed all previous performances’.¹¹ These comments strongly suggest that Chélaré’s conducting was, for London, novel in combining three elements: the baton, a conspicuous position in the orchestra and undivided control.

Chélaré’s short season was later described as ‘the solitary success’ of the opera season.¹² The contrast with normal practice at the King’s Theatre was widely remarked. Reviewing the Italian Opera’s production of Pacini’s *Gli Arabi nelle Gallie*, the *Athenaeum* wrote that:

The imperfect performance of the concerted music, the blundering accompaniments, the hurrying of the finales, the utter disregard of *chiaroscuro* were woefully conspicuous to a person who had witnessed the previous night’s performance [under Chélaré] of *Der Freischütz*.

It recommended Mason to hire Chélaré, ‘for his skilful maestro-like conducting’.¹³ The *Morning Post* ran a long review of Chélaré’s and Mendelssohn’s conducting to underline their superiority.¹⁴

Costa almost certainly knew Vaccai, Bellini and Chélaré from their time in Naples, where the latter two had studied under Zingarelli in the 1820s. Costa must also have seen their performances at the King’s Theatre. He shared a concert with Chélaré in June 1832 at the theatre’s Concert Room, where both were billed as ‘Conductor’ and

¹⁰ *Morning Post* (1832) and *Spectator* (1832), quoted in *Musical Times* (1 June 1896), 372-5.

¹¹ *Times* (5 July 1832). *Athenaeum* (7 July 1832), 444.

¹² Chorley, *Musical Recollections*, 37.

¹³ *Athenaeum* (19 and 12 May 1832), 325 and 310.

¹⁴ *Morning Post* (27 May 1832).

‘Directors of the music’.¹⁵ But although Chélaré offered a remedy for London’s orchestral ills, one-off visitors could not change London practice.

The evidence, admittedly sparse, suggests that Costa introduced effective baton-conducting over the period 1833 and 1837. It is clear from the *Spectator* report quoted above that he was not using a baton during Chélaré’s visit in 1832. But in July 1833 the *Examiner* accused him of ‘rapping his book as offensively as ever’ so that ‘We almost expect to see the notes leaping from the page under his baton.’¹⁶ The *Morning Post* commended Costa in May 1834 for adopting the baton, implying that this had happened only recently.¹⁷ This squares with the retrospective claim of Costa’s friend Gruneisen that he began to use the baton from 1833 ‘following the example of Chélaré, who, in the preceding season, had directed the performances with the stick’.¹⁸

Important though the symbolism of the baton was, Costa and other early baton-conductors appear to have used a rather crude technique and with mixed results. The baton did not enable Smart and Bishop to dominate the leader at the Philharmonic. Even Chélaré seems to have moved only gradually towards an effective system of control: in July 1832, he was advised to adopt ‘some less cacophonous and misleading signal than hissing’ and his orchestra at Drury Lane was described in 1833 as ‘very inferior’.¹⁹ In the same year, Costa too was still conducting noisily – ‘threshing time’ with ‘his obstreperous metronome’.²⁰ In 1834, he was berated for ‘belabouring his book with his

¹⁵ They are referred to as ‘Conductors’ in a King’s Theatre playbill of 14 June 1832 in the Tony Gasson Collection; and as ‘Directors’ in a *Times* advertisement of 8 June 1832.

¹⁶ *Examiner* (28 July 1833).

¹⁷ *Morning Post* (22 May 1834).

¹⁸ Gruneisen, *The Opera and the Press*, 17.

¹⁹ *Examiner* (15 July 1832); *Times* (7 May 1833).

²⁰ *Examiner* (28 July 1833).

baton as a thresher belabours his wheatsheaf, and keeping up an uninterrupted and most merciless tapage'.²¹

In 1835, the *Times* critic, possibly Thomas Alsager, complained that Costa was directing in a highly intrusive manner:

In his capacity of 'Conductor', Signor Costa no longer sits at the pianoforte, but holds a long roll of paper, with which he seems to think he ought to make himself as conspicuous as he can in marking time. Signor Costa may be assured that, as most of the members of this orchestra were already eminent in the profession before he was born, they can very well manage to get through their part in the *Gazza ladra* and other operas they have been performing for years past, without any interference whatever of his. We are surprised that the leader suffers such an encroachment on his attributes to continue.²²

In the same year, the writer Thomas Love Peacock reviewed Lord Mount Edgcumbe's *Musical Reminiscences* (1834), which had criticised George Smart for his conspicuous behaviour with a baton at the Handel commemoration of that year.²³ Taking the same theme, Peacock condemned 'the *novel* introduction of a conductor into the orchestra, not playing himself but beating time with a noisy baton'. He added 'Assuredly *our Italian conductor* verifies the remark of Dr Burney: "Rousseau says that the more time is beaten the less it is kept"'. Peacock went on to protest against a conductor (who must be Costa since he was the only Italian opera conductor in London in the mid-1830s):

keeping up, in the very centre of observation, a gesticulation and a *tapage* that make him at once the most conspicuous and most noisy personage in the assembly, distracting attention from the sights and sounds that ought exclusively to occupy it.²⁴

This evidence suggests that, although there was a rush to adopt some form of baton control in London in the period 1833-4, following the examples set during the visits of

²¹ *Examiner* (15 June 1834).

²² *Times* (13 March 1835).

²³ Mount Edgcumbe, *Musical Reminiscences*, 229-35.

²⁴ Thomas Love Peacock, 'Mangled Operas and the Star System' in ed. Halliford, *Works* (London: 1926), vol. 10, 235-50.

Chélaré (1832) and Hummel (1833), the transition to effective baton-control took several years. The notion of a slow process of consolidation would fit in with the thesis that Costa, as a new boy on unfamiliar ground and surrounded by powerful established personalities, was still feeling his way. He himself later dated 'his' orchestra to 1834 :

My orchestra is composed by 87 professors. They are all English except 14 who were born in the continent. Only three of them arrived after 1848, all the others have been under my ?command since the year 1834!!!²⁵

Charles Nicholson, principal flautist at the Philharmonic and the opera, writing in 1836, lends support to the conclusion that Costa's system began to come together in 1834-6:

A very great improvement has taken place *within the last few years* in the orchestras of this country, which may be mainly attributed to the introduction of Conductors, whose province it is to mark the time with a baton or stick...²⁶

Chorley adds credence to this timing; in 1847, when criticising the orchestra at Her Majesty's under Balfe, he wrote that it showed 'a badness unexampled (since 1834)'.²⁷

In May 1834, Costa was still sharing power with the leader: the *Morning Post* detected an improvement in the orchestra due to 'Spagnoletti's moral influence over his coadjutors'.²⁸ But four months later, Costa's position was strengthened when Spagnoletti died and was replaced by a more malleable leader in Nicolas Mori. In parallel, other elements of Costa's system were beginning to be embedded in the mid-1830s (4.2 below). Ella noticed in 1836 that Costa had taken over from Laporte the management of the players. Critics began during 1834 to detect an 'improved discipline of the opera band, under the system of the baton'.²⁹ This will have enabled him to adopt

25 Costa-Clay (20 May 1862), RAM 2005.1629. Costa's claim that only three new players joined his band after 1834 is highly questionable.

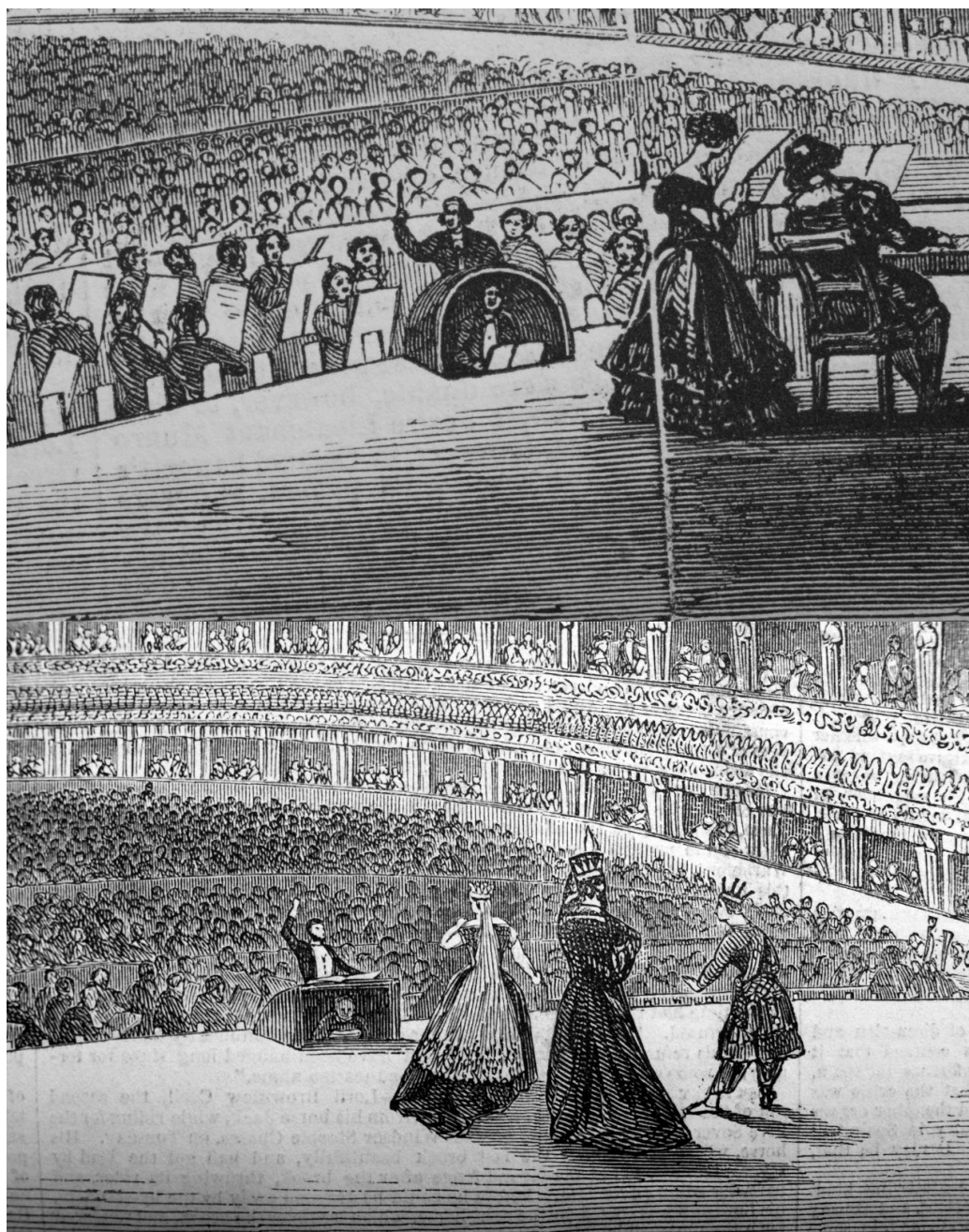
26 Charles Nicholson, *School for the Flute* (London: 1836), 18.

27 *Athenaeum* (7 Aug. 1847), 845.

28 *Morning Post* (22 May 1834).

29 *Morning Post* (22 May 1834).

a less noisy and conspicuous control technique (Chapter 5.3 below). The test of the new system was that from 1835 the orchestra received consistently better reviews.³⁰



Figs 4.3/4 Costa conducting at Her Majesty's in 1843 and Covent Garden in 1847 (detail)

By the end of the decade, Costa's baton technique was being held up as the model for conductors. The *Morning Post* advised Lucas, one of the Philharmonic conductors, to take a lesson from experienced conductors such as Moscheles, Mendelssohn and Costa.

³⁰ *Morning Post* (23 March and 15 May 1835) and *Morning Chronicle* (25 Aug. 1835).

‘There is no necessity for him to indicate with his baton every division of every bar in every composition...These musicians will teach him that to beat once in a bar is sufficient for all practical purposes.’³¹ It later advised Moscheles that: ‘It is energy of mind that is required from the chief of an orchestra, and not energy of body.’ A conductor should look not to the minutiae but to ‘the general effect. He should be the orchestral master-spirit to echo the inspirations of the master mind...This is the secret of Costa’s conductorship with the opera orchestra.’³²

In the opera house, Costa had difficulty, as did Habeneck in Paris, catering to the different needs of the orchestra and the singers. In practice, he appears to have conducted in front of the orchestra when necessary (for example for the overture) but to have stationed himself by the ramp when guiding the singers. At Her Majesty’s in 1843 and at Covent Garden in 1847, he is shown close to the stage, beating time for the singers, with his back to the orchestra (Figs 4.3/4). But increasingly he stood in front of the players. An illustration of 1855 shows Costa facing the orchestra, with his back to the audience, including the Queen and the Emperor Napoleon III (Fig. 4.5).



Fig. 4.5 State Visit of Victoria and Napoleon III to Covent Garden in 1855, Costa lower right.

³¹ *Morning Post* 18 May 1841.

³² *Morning Post* (25 April 1843).

Costa seems to have found it necessary to have a piano keyboard nearby, both for rehearsal and to rescue performances that were going awry. By 1837 the recitative was being accompanied not by the bass/cello duo but by the pianoforte.³³ The *Musical World* reported that ‘Costa has been frequently called upon to accompany on the pianoforte many long scenas, duets, trios etc., on the spur of the moment from memory’.³⁴ In the 1850s, he frequently had to use the pianoforte to

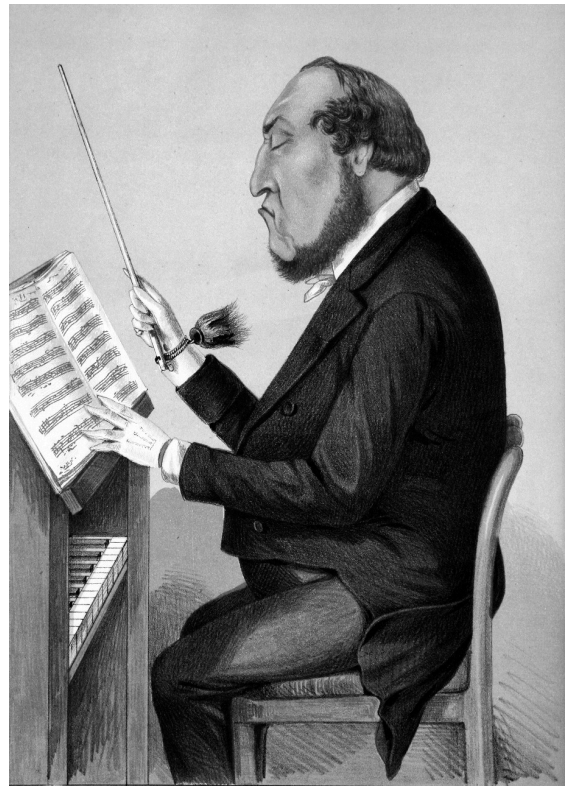


Fig. 4.6 *Vanity Fair* cartoon (*Vanity Fair*, 6 July 1862).

rescue performances by correcting the pitch or providing a cue.³⁵ As late as 1872, a *Vanity Fair* cartoon of Costa depicts him seated at a desk with a keyboard below (Fig. 4.6).

The baton and his prominence within the orchestra were, however, only one element of Costa’s system for controlling performance. Equally important were the other ingredients of his system, which is considered below, and how he actually used the baton (Chapter 5).

³³ *MW* (5 May 1837), 126.

³⁴ *Morning Post* (29 Aug. 1836).

³⁵ *Times* (4 April 1851). *MW* (1855), 121.

4.2 Costa's Reforms: The Substance

4.2.1 Management of the musicians

Before Costa's time, responsibility for managing the musicians was diffused. John Ebers stated that in the 1820s the players' contracts at Her Majesty's were made by the Musical Director.³⁶ Sometimes the leader selected the players, as Tom Cooke did for an oratorio at Drury Lane in 1836. But the main responsibility fell to the Manager, who as the lessee carried most of the financial risk. Costa challenged this because he believed that the conductor must have 'the free selection and uncontrolled direction' of both players and chorus.³⁷ By 1836 Ella remarked with surprise that Costa was now the 'responsible agent' for the opera band, who were 'not in contact often with the manager'.³⁸ By 1838, Costa was sharing with Laporte responsibility for auditioning the chorus.³⁹ He justified his direct management of the musicians on grounds of efficiency, but sensitive issues of status and power were also involved, which went to the core of Costa's personality and his uncertain position in English society (Chapter 2). Four key areas of management were at stake: numbers, pay, standards and discipline.

Numbers

In 1832, the King's Theatre orchestra had only 50 members, compared with Berlin (94), Paris (80) and Milan (68).⁴⁰ Many of the players were new recruits and as late as 1836 the reinforcement of the strings was still seen as urgent.⁴¹ In the following year, he

³⁶ Ebers, *Seven Years of the King's Theatre*, 362.

³⁷ ROHC, Costa-Gye corr. (27 Jan. 1869). See Chapter 7.

³⁸ Ella Diary, 29 Feb. 1836.

³⁹ *Morning Post* (5 Feb 1838 and 2 March 1838).

⁴⁰ *Athenaeum* (11 Feb. 1832), 100.

⁴¹ Ella Diary, 17 and 22 Feb. 1836.

increased the violins from 18 to 24 and his expanded orchestra was described as an important feature of the season ('finer than ever').⁴² By the late 1830s there were 76 players and a chorus of 69.⁴³ Costa's build-up involved a significant increase in the orchestra's share of the theatre's expenditure – from 7.67% (1821) to 9.73% (1833) and 16.94% (1834).⁴⁴ It provided the base from which at Covent Garden he later demanded a further expansion of the orchestra (to 86) and chorus (to 90).⁴⁵ Thereafter Costa successfully defended these figures, despite Gye's heavy pressure for economy in the 1860s (Chapter 7). His only compromise was to agree that, when an opera required bigger resources, he should take on casuals.

Numbers were less of a problem at the Philharmonic (where he inherited an orchestra of 76 players) and the SHS (where three-quarters of the players and most of the singers were amateurs). At the 1859 Handel Festival, his orchestra numbered 393 and the chorus 2,765.

Pay

Once Costa had the numbers he sought, the focus of dispute shifted to their salaries. This was one expense that managers saw as easier to constrain than the other big items – the lease and the soloists. But with Laporte, Lumley and Gye distracted by their financial-legal worries, he was able to build up unprecedented powers in this sensitive area. Having witnessed the strains when Laporte tried to squeeze salaries arbitrarily in

⁴² *MW* (14 April 1837), 78. An anonymous amateur, *Her Majesty's Theatre* (London: 1838), 6.

⁴³ Statistics about orchestral sizes are necessarily imprecise. Managers tended to quote maximum numbers and the actual band for a given opera was often smaller.

⁴⁴ Cowgill and Dideriksen, 'Opera orchestras in Georgian and early Victorian London', 272. The data on which these comparisons rest is, as they warn, not strictly comparable.

⁴⁵ Cowgill and Dideriksen estimate the size of the Covent Garden orchestra at 80 (1847), 84 (1848) and 86 (1863). 'Opera orchestras in Georgian and early Victorian London', 295-6. The *Times* reported that the orchestra had 86 players in 1848 (10 March 1848).

1829, Costa sought to create a clear but by no means generous pay-scale. One of the most vivid images of Costa as manager-conductor is of his attendance at the theatre for the Saturday payment of salaries, where he intervened to fine the laggards and reward the virtuous.⁴⁶ At the Philharmonic, he rationalised the pay regime, which had previously depended on arrangements negotiated by the eight Directors (Chapter 8).⁴⁷

The pay and contracts of the leading singers remained a matter for the manager. But Costa had considerable leverage through his Italian connections and his control of access to private concerts. He often acted as the intermediary between Gye and the soloists, who respected him and were afraid to cross his powerful personality.⁴⁸ When Gye and Costa clashed over whether *Faust* was ready for performance, ‘Tamberlik and Madame Carvalho both said the opera could be done – ‘not, of course, in the presence of Costa’.⁴⁹ His indirect influence is apparent in letters instructing Laporte’s assistant Lumley to make the final payment owed to Madame Castelli and to refrain from paying Lablache or Tosti without talking to him.⁵⁰

Standards

Because the size of the orchestra and chorus was limited by genuine economic constraints, Costa needed to be able to replace incompetent players. This was a delicate process since the rank-and-file musicians were underpaid and some had influential protectors. The process of weeding out is understandably not well chronicled. Ella

⁴⁶ William Kuhe, *Musical Recollections*, 58.

⁴⁷ A new scale of Philharmonic fees for 1846 is set out in BL 48. 9/2: £20 for principals and £13-15 for rank-and-file. According to Robert Elkin there was a further increase in 1852. *Annals of the Royal Philharmonic Society* (London: Rider and Co., 1946), 47.

⁴⁸ For example with Lablache and Formes in 1854. Gye, 1 Feb. 1854. This throws doubt on Dideriksen’s surmise that Costa did not influence soloist engagements after 1849. Dideriksen, 214.

⁴⁹ Gye, 26 June 1863.

⁵⁰ Costa-Lumley (19 Aug. 1837 and 5 April 1839), the collection of the late Tony Gasson.

regretted in his diary that one player, Rubbi, had been dismissed; but he added that it was 'lucky for a band to have a conductor respected and relied upon by the manager and to possess the confidence of those under his control, such as is the case now at the Italian Opera'.⁵¹ The *Morning Post* credited him with replacing the previous arbitrary selection process by one based on 'system and qualification'.⁵²

The temporary influx of foreign players during the 1848 revolutions enabled Costa to replace several older players and warn others that they would be dropped if they did not improve.⁵³ But attracting good players became more difficult after 1850, when many returned to the Continent. Costa recruited his principal cellist, August van Biene, after hearing him busking in Hanover Square.⁵⁴ His hold over his musicians – demonstrated when 53 players resigned from Her Majesty's to join him at Covent Garden in 1847 – rested on their respect for him and their awareness that he controlled their access to lucrative work at private concerts and the festivals. This became a crucial asset in the period of intense competition with Her Majesty's in the period 1847-52, when the calibre and loyalty of Costa's musicians gave Covent Garden a telling advantage.

The standards he achieved at the opera house provided the core of Costa's orchestra at the Philharmonic and the festivals. But weeding out remained a constant concern; a year after his death, Shaw remarked that 'some of Costa's men have become in the course of time rather pressingly eligible for superannuation'.⁵⁵ One of Costa's novel measures to raise orchestral standards was to place stronger players alongside weaker ones in order

⁵¹ Ella Diary, 29 Feb. 1836.

⁵² *Morning Post* (18 April 1843).

⁵³ *MW* (22 Jan. 1848), 62.

⁵⁴ *New York Times* (24 Jan. 1913).

⁵⁵ *Shaw's Music*, vol. 1, 344.

to educate and strengthen the latter. He introduced this first at the opera: the *Musical World* commented in 1839 that Costa ‘had now presided long enough over this band to distinguish the educated from the uneducated musician – to know where he can place implicit reliance and where attention is most required...’⁵⁶ Gruneisen described this as a key element in his new lay-out at the Philharmonic, possible only because of Costa’s ‘personal knowledge of the temperament, execution, and trust-worthiness of the individual members of the band’.⁵⁷

The chorus was slower to come up to scratch. Although Costa took advantage of the 1833 strike to bring in new singers, it was described in 1836 as ‘not quite at its worst, but very near it’.⁵⁸ The chorus began to attract regular praise from 1838. By 1847 it was regarded as a more important asset than the ballet.⁵⁹

Discipline

The indiscipline of English orchestras was a frequent theme in press reports and memoirs of the 1830s. Adolphe Adam noted that the members of the Covent Garden orchestra tended to get drunk on payday with the result that Saturday night performances were marked by strange ‘couaks’ from the oboe and clarinet and snores from the bassoons.⁶⁰ The Philharmonic was described as ‘intractable’, with ‘many rebellious subjects...who fancy they are as competent to teach the conductor as he is to instruct them’.⁶¹ Indiscipline of a different sort underlay the poor coordination and

⁵⁶ *MW* (19 May 1839), 23.

⁵⁷ *Morning Post* (March 1846).

⁵⁸ *Athenaeum* (26 March 1836), 227; and (28 May 1836), 386.

⁵⁹ *Times* (26 March 1838).

⁶⁰ Adolphe Adam, *Souvenirs d'un Musicien* (Paris: 1868), 54-7.

⁶¹ *Morning Herald* (1845).

ensemble playing that foreigners observed in London. The *Musical World* quoted a telling comparison by a German observer in 1836: ‘In London, you hear distinctly that the music is produced by many; whereas in Paris, it appears as if the whole were the work of one mind and one hand’.⁶² Just before Costa’s arrival at the Philharmonic, another writer commented that each player there performs ‘too much in solo fashion’, whereas ‘second-rate performers, under the entire subjection of the conductor, will execute a classical work with better taste and feeling than the first-rate performers who are too proud to be led’.⁶³ As late as 1852, the same journal asked why the Philharmonic players, as skilled as their equivalents in the Paris Conservatoire, produced poorer ensemble playing: ‘Whence then comes the difference? It is discipline – obedience’.⁶⁴

Discipline and command are the two leitmotifs of Costa’s career. This is reflected in the metaphors most associated with him (Chapter 5). By 1839, the *Musical World* judged that ‘The orchestra is now...in a finer state of discipline than any other band in London’.⁶⁵ Success in imposing discipline at the opera made it easier to do the same at the Philharmonic, which shared many of the same players. Costa’s conditions for accepting the Philharmonic included a pledge from the Directors ‘to support me in the strict discipline of the orchestra’.

Costa’s ability to impose tight discipline remained personal to him, with the result that orchestras behaved differently when others were on the rostrum (Chapter 5). Some attributed this to Costa’s ‘moral power’ (Davison) or ‘moral discipline’ (Ella).⁶⁶ But it

⁶² Friedrich von Raumer in *MW* (15 April 1836), 73-4.

⁶³ C.F. Flowers in the *Literary Gazette*, quoted in Carse, *Beethoven to Berlioz*, 223.

⁶⁴ *MW* (28 Feb. 1852), 135.

⁶⁵ *MW* (19 May 1839), 23.

⁶⁶ *MW* (21 March 1846), 130-1 and Ella, *Musical Sketches*, 248.

also rested in part on his control over the musicians' contracts and terms of employment. Ella's contract at Covent Garden required him to 'attend punctually and perform at the rehearsals that may be appointed by the Musical Director'.⁶⁷ One of the unusual features of Costa's system was that he filled in the details of the musicians' contracts and sent them to the Manager for automatic signature, after which they were stored at his private residence (Chapter 7).⁶⁸ Gye repeatedly tried to wrest control over the players. In 1855, he amended some of the chorus engagements but Costa's solicitor brought them back, saying that Costa 'would not allow' them and that Gye must 'sign all the chorus and band engagements in blank for Costa to fill up afterwards!!!' Gye refused but eventually gave in, on condition that two players should be omitted, a condition that Costa blithely ignored.⁶⁹ This set the pattern for fixing musicians' contracts until Costa's resignation in 1869 (Appendix A).

The value of the discipline that Costa put on himself and his players was shown in the heavy burden they bore during the busy London season. In May 1851, they rehearsed *Fidelio* at Covent Garden for five hours before tackling a long Philharmonic programme including Mozart's Symphony no. 39 and Beethoven's Symphony no. 4.⁷⁰ Costa's regime of discipline, which gradually influenced other London orchestras, marked one of the most striking changes of the early Victorian period. It was a prerequisite for the superior performances of London orchestras under the major conductors of the next generation – Richter, Campanini, von Bülow.

4.2.2 Lay-out and acoustics

⁶⁷ Contract of 21 Aug. 1846. Appendix A.

⁶⁸ ROHC, Gye-Costa corr. (5 April 1869).

⁶⁹ Gye, 30 March 1855.

⁷⁰ *Times* (27 May 1851).

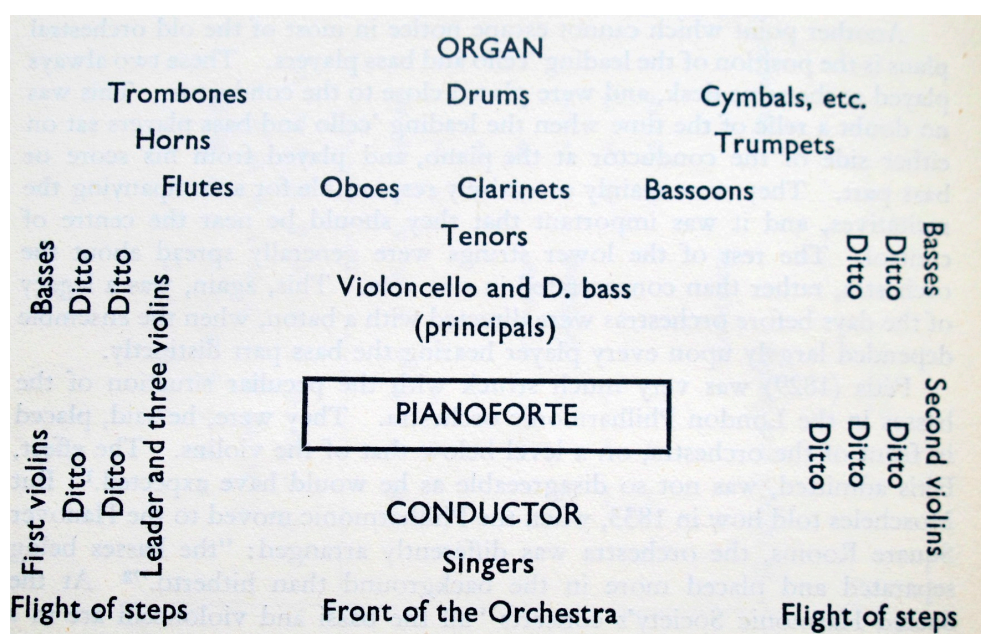


Fig. 4.7 The Philharmonic lay-out in 1840 (*Musical World*, 6 Feb.1840, 83).

Costa's principal reform of orchestral lay-out was effected at the Philharmonic in 1846. The traditional London concert model involved 'the conductor facing the audience instead of his forces', with the continuo group of the leading violin, cello and bass at the centre next to the conductor's pianoforte, and the rest of the strings interspersed behind, rather than grouped by section⁷¹ (Fig. 4.7). It seems also to have been the norm at opera concerts. A *Punch* cartoon of 1849 shows Jullien at a promenade concert, standing in the middle of his players and facing the audience (Fig. 4.8).

This arrangement became less satisfactory as the roles of leader, conductor and the basso continuo changed. John Ella confided in his Diary in 1836 that the strings should be 'dispersed on the principle adopted in Paris, violins in front concentrated, cellos, idem violas...' ⁷² Minor changes were tried out at the Philharmonic: grouping the basses and moving them to the rear in 1833 ; and grouping the higher strings on either side of the conductor in 1840.⁷³

⁷¹ Article in unidentified journal preserved in Ella Collection, f81. Details at Appendix C.

⁷² Ella Diary, (22 Feb. 1836).

⁷³ Moscheles, *Life*, vol. 1, 288. *Musical World* (6 Feb. 1840), 83.



Fig. 4.8 *Punch* cartoon, showing Jullien conducting a Prom concert (*Punch*, 1849, 245).

Costa's new lay-out at the Philharmonic is illustrated in Carse, Nettle and Ehrlich. But the fullest description, by Gruneisen (Appendix C and Fig. 4.9). It involved five radical

bass	bass	bass	organ	bass	bass	bass
bass	3 cello	2 trumpet	2 drum	3 trombone	3 cello	bass
	4 horn	2 flute	2 clarinet	2 oboe	2 bassoon	
	2 violin	3 viola	2 cello	3 viola	2 cello	
	4 1st violin		4 viola		4 2nd violin	
	4 1st violin	violin leader	Costa	principal bass/cello	4 2nd Violin	

Fig. 4.9 Costa's 1846 lay-out. Author's schema based on Gruneisen's account (March 1846).

alterations. First, he grouped the violins and violas in an arc round the conductor, followed by the horn and woodwind sections, then the cellos and brass, and finally the double-basses round the back. Second, he reduced the steep rake by more than half, so

that the brass no longer dominated the other players.⁷⁴ Third, he moved the choir from the front of the stage to behind the orchestra.⁷⁵ Fourth, the fortepiano (a ‘ridiculous appendage...the resource of all incompetent conductors’) was removed, except when needed for performance.⁷⁶ Finally, he himself ‘faced his troops instead of fronting the audience’, thus ensuring that he was at all times visible to all the members of the orchestra.⁷⁷ Unlike Jullien, who made himself the focal point for the audience, Costa aimed to ensure that he was the focus for the players and singers. The new lay-out was immediately noticed – by Queen Victoria among others. The Philharmonic Secretary Hogarth described it as ‘a complete revolution’.⁷⁸

Similar reform of the lay-out was required on the oratorio circuit, where the chorus traditionally stood behind the ‘conductor,’ who was himself obscured by the leader.⁷⁹ At his first appearance in charge of the Birmingham Festival in 1849, Costa caused surprise by moving the rostrum back so that he could see all the singers, soloists and players.⁸⁰ He retained the cello and bass leads in the centre, with the first and second violins on either side; the violas, woodwind, brass and larger strings were arrayed in ranks behind.⁸¹ He further developed this arrangement at the Handel Festivals where, rather than using the sub-conductors that were common in Paris, he specified each performer’s place so that his podium was visible to all.

⁷⁴ *Daily News* (13 March 1846).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Morning Post* (March 1846).

⁷⁷ *ILN* (21 May 1846), 193.

⁷⁸ *ILN* (21 May 1846), 193.

⁷⁹ *Times* (19 April 1847).

⁸⁰ *ILN* (8 Sept. 1849), 170.

⁸¹ *ILN* (8 Sept. 1849), 168.

Costa initially had little scope to improve the lay-out of the orchestra in the opera house where, as Rowlandson's aquatint of 1809 shows, the players were congested in two rows, and separated by the continuo group of harpsichord, bass and cello leads, placed half left (Fig. 4.10).



Fig. 4.10 The King's Theatre, 1809 (detail).

Costa took over some of the parterre in 1838 to accommodate his expanding orchestra.⁸² But as late as 1843 the *ILN* was still contrasting the expansive lay-out of the Philharmonic orchestra with 'the little regiment which Costa musters in such orderly strength in the little pit between the stalls and the stage of Her Majesty's Theatre' (Fig. 4.11).⁸³

⁸² *MW* (29 March 1838), 220.

⁸³ *ILN* (24 June 1843), 439.



Fig. 4.11 Her Majesty's Theatre in 1844, showing the cramped pit.

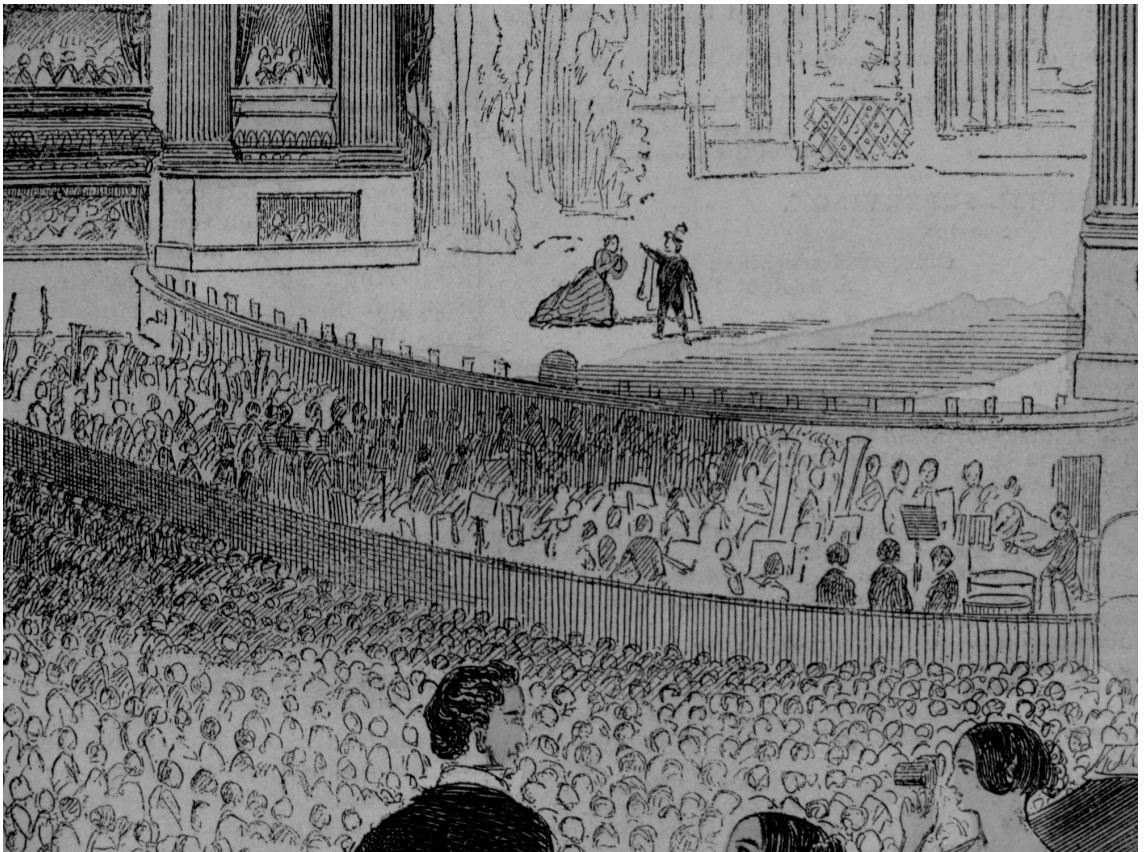


Fig. 4.12 Covent Garden 1847–56 with enlarged orchestra pit (detail).

Illustrations of the re furbished Covent Garden after 1847 show that the orchestra was allowed more space so that the players could sit four deep (Fig. 4.12). The *ILN* reported

the new lay-out there as a significant innovation. ‘The players sit now, not in straight lines as formerly but in curves, the first and second violins and the tenors [violas] being immediately next to the audience...The violincelli and double basses have been brought more forward at each extremity.⁸⁴ The *Times* noticed that the violins were concentrated on each side of the conductor; the violas were divorced from the cellos, who ‘now play out of the books of the double-basses’.⁸⁵

One important aspect of Costa’s lay-out was his concern to improve the acoustics. He was probably the first conductor in the country to treat this problem systematically. In this respect, the removal of the high rake at the Philharmonic was especially important. The *ILN* commented that Costa had ‘studied the principles of acoustics and successfully blended the tones of the orchestra’. Gruneisen observed that ‘his great point in the blending of instruments is to have sufficient strength of stringed instruments to counter-balance the modern excess of brass and wind instruments’.⁸⁶ At the opening of Covent Garden, the *ILN* reported that Costa has achieved a most important improvement in the balance of instruments:

by adding to the strength of the stringed ones, the braying of the brass has been balanced. We never heard such first violins for brilliancy, and the luscious tones of the tenors and violincelli and the power and crispness of the double-basses were quite as delightful...there was an observance of the nicest graduations of time and of varied colouring altogether unprecedented in an English orchestra.⁸⁷

Costa faced more acute acoustical problems at the biggest choral venues. At the Crystal Palace, he had to experiment at each successive Handel Festival (Chapter 8). By 1865, the acoustic of the grand choruses had been rectified, but it was not until 1868 that

⁸⁴ *ILN* (11 March 1848), 168.

⁸⁵ *Times* (10 March 1848).

⁸⁶ Review of March 1846 in unidentified article, probably by Gruneisen, *Ella* f. 22.

⁸⁷ *ILN* (10 April 1847), 234.

soloists could carry in the vast space: ‘the music was clearly and distinctly audible, from the thunder of the whole orchestra to the softest tones of every single voice or instrument’.⁸⁸ At the Albert Hall, where the acoustics were famously bad and the biggest organ in the world proved to be out of tune, Henry Cole recalled Costa’s dismay at the first rehearsals. ‘Costa... was broken-hearted. “Flat, although there were 1200 performers,” he said.’ He later laid on large-scale concerts to test the changes needed in the acoustics.⁸⁹

4.2.3 Rehearsals

London was notorious for its cavalier attitude to rehearsals. The heavy concentration of the London ‘season’ made it difficult to gather together the small number of good players who were in demand at many venues. But the main problem was that the economics of the music industry in London did not permit multiple rehearsals, especially as orchestras became larger. At the 1837 Birmingham Festival, Mendelssohn had to cram seven performances into four days, with only one day for rehearsal: ‘That is how calves are led to the slaughterhouse.’⁹⁰ Wagner was horrified to discover that ‘the Society’s economical arrangements allowed me only one rehearsal’.⁹¹ Berlioz joked that London impresarios had ‘brought the art of accelerated musical rehearsals to a degree of splendour unknown to other nations. On our side of the British Channel, to learn and stage a five-act opera, ten months are required; on the other side, ten days’.⁹² Berlioz

⁸⁸ *ILN* (8 July 1865), 18 and (13 June 1868), 591.

⁸⁹ *Times* (13 April 1871).

⁹⁰ Mendelssohn’s Diary, 18 Sept. 1837, quoted by Todd, *Mendelssohn*, 357.

⁹¹ Wagner-Hogarth (28 Dec. 1854), Hueffer, *Half a Century of Music in England* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1889), 45.

⁹² Berlioz, *Les Soirées d’Orchestre* (Paris: Guichard, 1968), 107 and Cyril Ehrlich, *First Philharmonic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 81.

had to abandon his plan to perform the *Symphonie Fantastique* at the Philharmonic on being told that a single rehearsal was '*l'usage invariable de la Société*'.⁹³

English writers on music tended to exaggerate how much rehearsal time was normally allowed on the Continent.⁹⁴ But they were correct that London's rehearsal regime was unusually austere, especially compared with Berlin and Paris.⁹⁵ Smart remarked on the orderliness of rehearsals in Prague – 'so different to our opera-houses'.⁹⁶ Alfred Bunn left an amusing picture of the leisurely attitude to rehearsals in Paris.⁹⁷ The *QMMR* observed that it was not unusual to hear that an opera or symphony has been rehearsed thirty or forty times on the Continent:

How different is the case with us. At the theatre an author must consider himself fortunate if he can have his opera tried over five or six times; with the band scarcely complete on any one occasion.⁹⁸

Chorley commented that 'all the efficient rehearsal and preparation which is done at all is done there [in Paris] and not in London'.⁹⁹ This made it easier for managers to squeeze rehearsal time in London. But although London productions often followed hard on the heels of Paris, this was not always the case and there were frequent complaints that shoddily prepared performances prevented London musicians from understanding new pieces and correcting errors in the often defective scores:

93 Letter to Berlioz (9 May 1853), BL Loan 48.6/3.

94 I am grateful to Professor Weber for the information that there was limited rehearsal time for Philharmonic concerts in Vienna and that the *Concerts Spirituels* rarely had more than two rehearsals.

95 The Conservatoire under Habeneck rehearsed Beethoven's Eroica for 16 months before performing in public. Ella, *Musical Sketches*, 396-7 and Elwart, *Histoire de la Société des Concerts* (Paris: 1860), 5, 12.

96 Sir George Smart Papers, BL, Add. MSS 71825, Journal, f. 32.

97 Alfred Bunn, *The Stage, both before and behind the curtain* (London: 1840, Richard Bentley), vol. 3, 183-5.

98 *QMMR* (vol. 5, no.XX), 433/4.

99 *Athenaeum* (6 Aug. 1836), 555.

New music is frequently brought before the public after having been merely run through ONCE – and that, perhaps, so closely to the performance, that the author has hardly time to correct any mistakes.¹⁰⁰

In 1842 Chorley observed a Philharmonic rehearsal that rattled through the programme ‘without one solitary check or control on the part of the conductor.’¹⁰¹

There was a greater need for intensive rehearsal as the orchestra expanded and the repertoire became more complex. The *Musical World* reminded its readers that the high standard at the Paris Conservatoire ‘is only got by repeated rehearsal’.¹⁰² The same journal had earlier described a typical London rehearsal:

What haste! What inaccuracy! What a scrambling to get to the end. Then what a shutting up of fiddle cases; what a pocketing of flutes and clarionets, and a running in all directions!...everyone is in a hurry, but the poor author; who, in this general hurry, discovers the sad presage of the imperfect performance of his music and its probable failure.¹⁰³

The corollary was that London orchestras were famous for their sight-reading and ability to perform with minimal rehearsal. Economy in rehearsal was for many a matter of pride. Reviewing a performance of *Lucrezia Borgia* in 1848, the *Times* commented that ‘What cost M. Habeneck 18 months of hard labour scarcely cost Mr Costa as many days.’¹⁰⁴ In 1848, when the royal family demanded that *Les Huguenots* be put on at two week’s notice, compared with 96 rehearsals in Paris, the *Times* boasted that:

In England we manage these things differently...Mr Costa is not easily to be daunted and, sure of his band and chorus as of himself, he undertook the unexpected task and...accomplished it to admiration.¹⁰⁵

100 *QMMR* (vol. 5, no. XX), 433/4.

101 *Athenaeum* (9 April 1842), 323.

102 *MW* (28 Feb. 1852), 135.

103 *MW* (16 Feb. 1843), 64.

104 *Times* (25 Aug. 1848).

105 *Times* (21 July 1848).

Rehearsal constraints were often used also to justify inadequate performance. A middling performance of Beethoven's Symphony no. 9 in 1849 led the *ILN* to compliment Costa on what he achieved 'with the materials at his command...and scanty preparation'.¹⁰⁶ The *Times* noted that Nicolai's Vienna Philharmonic had 13 rehearsals for this work, adding that 'only a conductor like Mr Costa, whose quickness, decision and personal as well as artistic influence over his orchestra are so great, could have managed to effect what was effected last night'.¹⁰⁷

At the opera, Costa's strict rehearsal regime was made into a publicity asset. He was commended for postponing the opening of the 1848 season when revolution in Paris prevented the soloists from travelling to London: 'Costa would not risk the musical reputation of the theatre with hurried rehearsals'.¹⁰⁸ But rehearsal time became an increasing source of friction during the rivalry between Covent Garden and Her Majesty's, when Gye worried that Costa's perfectionism would enable Lumley (and later Mapleson) to pre-empt his new productions (Chapter 7). Since Costa knew that Gye could not afford multiple rehearsals, his only option was to ensure that rehearsal time was used more efficiently. This was a skill highly commended by Berlioz:

In the majority of European cities nowadays Musical Artisanry is so ill-distributed, performers so ill-paid and the necessity to study so little understood that economy of time should be reckoned among the most imperative requisites of the orchestral conductor's art.¹⁰⁹

Costa was rarely able to have the part-rehearsals, which Berlioz regarded as essential. But he reformed rehearsal practice in several ways.

¹⁰⁶ *ILN* (31 March 1849), 339.

¹⁰⁷ *Times* (12 June 1849).

¹⁰⁸ *ILN* (11 March 1848), 168.

¹⁰⁹ Berlioz, Supplement to *Traité*, 246.

First, he applied strict rules of punctuality. Berlioz complained that London players came and went from rehearsals, never giving him a full complement: ‘That is how discipline is understood in this country.’¹¹⁰ One of Costa’s conditions for taking on the Philharmonic was that rehearsals should be brought forward an hour to 11.00 am, which he later advanced to 10.00.¹¹¹ He fined players who turned up late and even closed the doors so that late arrivals were not admitted.¹¹² Under Costa, ‘the orchestra became a model of punctuality and serious work’.¹¹³ Mapleson, who poked fun at his fixation with clocks, conceded that ‘his love of order, punctuality, regularity in everything, stood him in excellent stead’.¹¹⁴ Poor attendance at rehearsal was a serious problem at the SHS, but Costa secured a change of rules in 1853 permitting the suspension of players who were guilty of ‘negligent attendance’.¹¹⁵ His reputation ensured that, when he took over the Birmingham Festival, ‘Everyone was at his post at the appointed hour, Mr Costa as usual before the rest, and nobody detained an instant longer than was absolutely requisite.’¹¹⁶

Second, he applied his rules equally to everyone, regardless of status. Mendelssohn described how in 1846 Grisi, Mario and Lablache ‘lounged quietly in with their cool nonchalance’ for a rehearsal at 10.00 pm.¹¹⁷ But there are numerous stories of Costa

¹¹⁰ Ganz, *Berlioz in London* (London: Quality Press 1950), 37. Cited in Musgrave, ‘Changing values’.

¹¹¹ *MW* (15 March 1851), 161.

¹¹² *Morning Post* (28 April 1862).

¹¹³ *Musical Times* (1 June 1884), 321.

¹¹⁴ Mapleson, *Memoirs*, 131.

¹¹⁵ SHS cuttings at RCM Centre for Performance History, London.

¹¹⁶ *Times* (5 Sept. 1849).

¹¹⁷ Mendelssohn-Frege, ed. Reiz, *Letters*, 376.

publicly rebuking stars for missing rehearsals or turning up late.¹¹⁸ Patti (Fig. 7.6) who later became notorious for refusing to attend rehearsals, respected Costa's rules, though she complained that he demanded too many rehearsals for revivals.¹¹⁹

Third, he banned visitors from the rehearsal room, a privilege that managers had advertised to attract subscribers.¹²⁰ John Ella wrote in his diary that:

I have ever considered it bad policy to allow strangers to attend rehearsals. It is impossible to dictate to a singer or performer without wounding his *amour propre* in the presence probably of his pupils as well as friends.¹²¹

Mendelssohn's interruption of an open Saturday rehearsal at the Philharmonic to correct mistakes was unusual enough to attract comment.¹²² But the following year, it was said that 'the orchestra regards every stop as a personal affront, to be resisted and resented by free-born Britons'.¹²³ Costa seems to have enforced his 'stringent edict' from 1851, when the *Musical World* reported that it enabled him to make corrections, which previously 'no conductor could have ventured to enforce, and no orchestra would have endured'.¹²⁴ There was a similar trend at the opera, where Costa enjoyed contractual control over rehearsals (Appendix A). When the Prince of Wales was exceptionally allowed to attend a rehearsal, Gye warned him not to mention it to anyone.¹²⁵

Fourth, he prepared thoroughly in order to make the fullest use of rehearsal time. Ella commented privately: 'Costa proves a very able *maestro*; takes great pains and saves us

¹¹⁸ Santley, *Student and Singer*, 181. Ella, *Musical Sketches*, 248. Gye, 16 June 1865.

¹¹⁹ Gye, 4 and 9 July 1863. H Sutherland Edwards, *The Prima Donna* (London: Eemington and Co., 1888), vol. 2, 85.

¹²⁰ Mason's prospectus for 1832 in *Times* (5 Sept. 1831).

¹²¹ Ella Diary, 29 June 1836.

¹²² *Morning Post* (14 May 1844).

¹²³ *Athenaeum* (2 Aug. 1845), 772.

¹²⁴ *MW* (15 March 1851), 162.

¹²⁵ Gye, 30 May 1867.

much trouble'.¹²⁶ The baritone Charles Santley praised him for never wasting a moment of time at rehearsals.¹²⁷ His performing scores for the SHS carry metronome markings for virtually every section, with liberal dynamic markings in blue pencil – often twenty to a page.¹²⁸ August Manns, who succeeded Costa in the Handel Festivals, claimed that Costa relied too much on 'cues'. But such attention to preparation and cues was a sign of the new professionalism, as practised by Habeneck and Berlioz.

Fifth, he drove his musicians hard in rehearsal. Before 1846, the frequent notices that Philharmonic players should 'remain for the whole of every concert and rehearsal' showed that rehearsals had often been skimped.¹²⁹ In his first year with the Philharmonic, the *Times* commented that 'It is the merit of Signor Costa that he has none of the *laissez-aller* in his composition, but at rehearsal *will* have every passage repeated until it goes right there.'¹³⁰ This was in stark contrast to Smart, who 'never wearied his forces by tedious repetitions at rehearsals, nor provoked them by constant fault-finding'.¹³¹ The corollary was that, in performance, Costa nursed the orchestra to disguise their errors – unlike Habeneck who publicly exposed mistakes.¹³²

Finally, and most significantly, he ended the practice, under which leading players sent deputies to represent them at rehearsals, happily paying a small fine for non-attendance out of the high fees they obtained elsewhere. The Philharmonic had long given up its rule that players must obtain the Directors' permission before sending a deputy. Costa

¹²⁶ Ella Diary (17 March 1836).

¹²⁷ Santley, *Student and Singer*, 181.

¹²⁸ SHS scores at the Foundling Museum, London and RCMA.

¹²⁹ Examples of Directors' notices about the need for punctuality and full attendance are given in Elkin, *Annals*, 34.

¹³⁰ *Times* (21 April 1846).

¹³¹ Cox, *Musical Recollections*, 91.

¹³² *Morning Post* (4 Aug. 1843) and Southon, 'L'émergence de la figure de chef d'orchestre', 411,

introduced a more stringent regime, threatening to engage ‘substitutes at the expense of performers absent’ and announcing that anyone absent from rehearsal without permission would forfeit his engagement.¹³³ Ella was probably exaggerating when he claimed that: ‘The complete band attended at all future rehearsals...The six or eight rehearsals were gradually reduced to two or three, and finally the choir and band were so thoroughly drilled that the revival of any opera never required more than one patient rehearsal’. But by 1841, the prospectus for Her Majesty’s boasted that members of the opera orchestra were now required to attend all rehearsals.

He had more freedom – and greater need – to insist on heavy rehearsals in the semi-amateur world of the choral societies. The *Herald* critic wrote of ‘severe and frequent’ rehearsals for its first performance of Mozart’s *Requiem*.¹³⁴ Rehearsals for the big festivals presented a special challenge because the performers came from choirs accustomed to different tempi and performing styles.¹³⁵ Costa tackled this by appointing ‘sub-committees to audition each vocal part’ and introducing regional rehearsals early in the year, so that singers arrived at the Festivals prepared to perform with a single rehearsal. Such part-rehearsals, a key element in Habeneck’s system, called for a high degree of coordination and delegation (Chapter 8).

Rigour and intensity were the main virtues of Costa’s rehearsal regime. The downside was his tendency to overwork his forces. At the Birmingham Festival in 1862, the chorus was ‘languid from over-much work’.¹³⁶ Lumley alleged that over-rehearsal of

¹³³ Ella, *Musical Sketches*, 247-8. Confirmed by Cox, *Musical Recollections*, 180.

¹³⁴ *Herald* (10 Feb. 1853).

¹³⁵ *Examiner* (24 July 1871).

¹³⁶ Stanford, *Pages from an Unwritten Diary*, 109.

Costa's *Don Carlos* left both Mario and Lablache hoarse.¹³⁷ Mapleson too implied that Costa's diligence went too far:

Nothing would satisfy him but to go on rehearsing a work until everything, and especially until the ensemble pieces, were perfect. Then he would have one final rehearsal in order to assure himself that this perfection was maintained.'¹³⁸

But despite the delays that he imposed, Costa's insistence on rigorous rehearsal became one of the company's assets.

Costa's rehearsal regime was underpinned by his long tenure and the high degree of continuity in his orchestras. This meant that his musicians were familiar with his baton technique, and understood what effects he wanted to achieve. Ella noted in his diary that 'One of the advantages of a musical establishment being under the permanent direction of one person is...being able to revive operas without the tedium of frequent rehearsal'.¹³⁹ Costa put on 40 performances of *Les Huguenots* in 1850-53. He could do the same, to some extent, at the SHS, where the main oratorios featured every year and poor initial performances could be redeemed by re-worked repeats (as with Mendelssohn's *St Paul* in 1850).¹⁴⁰ But repetition was not often an option with the demanding symphonic repertoire of the Philharmonic, where Costa's performances were later compared unflatteringly with those of conductors like Berlioz, who boasted that he was allowed 'a sufficient number of rehearsals, something almost without precedent in England'.¹⁴¹ He also lacked the advantage enjoyed by Manns, who could treat his mid-week concerts as a dry-run for his more important Saturday platforms.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Lumley, *Reminiscences*, 79.

¹³⁸ Mapleson, *Memoirs*, 131.

¹³⁹ Ella Diary (3 May 1836).

¹⁴⁰ *Times* quoted in *Musical Times* vol. 3, No. 69 (1 Feb. 1850), 277.

¹⁴¹ Berlioz, Addition to *Soirées d'Orchestre*, no. 21.

¹⁴² I am grateful to Professor Musgrave for this insight, which is corroborated by *Pall Mall Gazette* (12 April 1875).

4.2.4 Infrastructure and Coordination

Operating during the season in several spheres – opera, oratorio and private and public concerts – Costa had to develop ways of ensuring that scarce musicians were available for a variety of venues. This problem was especially acute in London, given the large number of events crammed into the short season. His control of the resources of the opera house gave him unique power to coordinate rehearsals and performances with those of other bodies that drew on the opera orchestra and soloists. Costa was the only person who could resolve conflicting claims on the players from opera managers, the Philharmonic Directors and the Festivals. The importance of this role became clear after he left the Philharmonic, which found itself in 1857 putting on a concert on the same day as the Handel Festival. From 1862, the Philharmonic lost about forty players when Covent Garden demanded that its players should be available to perform on Mondays.

But Costa's contribution to the music industry went beyond this basic form of coordination. His direction of the massive Victorian state and festival occasions (Chapter 8) demanded a new system to galvanise the unprecedented forces involved. Smart and Bishop had conducted the opening of the 1851 Great Exhibition 'without a proper orchestra' and 'huddled' in the Crystal Palace transept, producing 'little or no effect'.¹⁴³ When asked to conduct at the re-opening of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham in 1854, Costa characteristically told the organising committee that it would be 'unwise that any musical performance should be entered into unless upon a very large scale'. He wanted 'an amateur spirit' to prevail, but demanded three military bands and his own Covent Garden orchestra – a total of 1710 performers.¹⁴⁴ The chorus, three times larger

¹⁴³ Bowley, *Sacred Harmonic Society*, 33.

¹⁴⁴ Robert Bowley, *Account of the re-opening of the Crystal Palace*, RCM Centre for Performance History. Much of the following detail draws on this valuable source.

than in 1851, was recruited from 21 provincial choirs. Costa insisted, against the advice

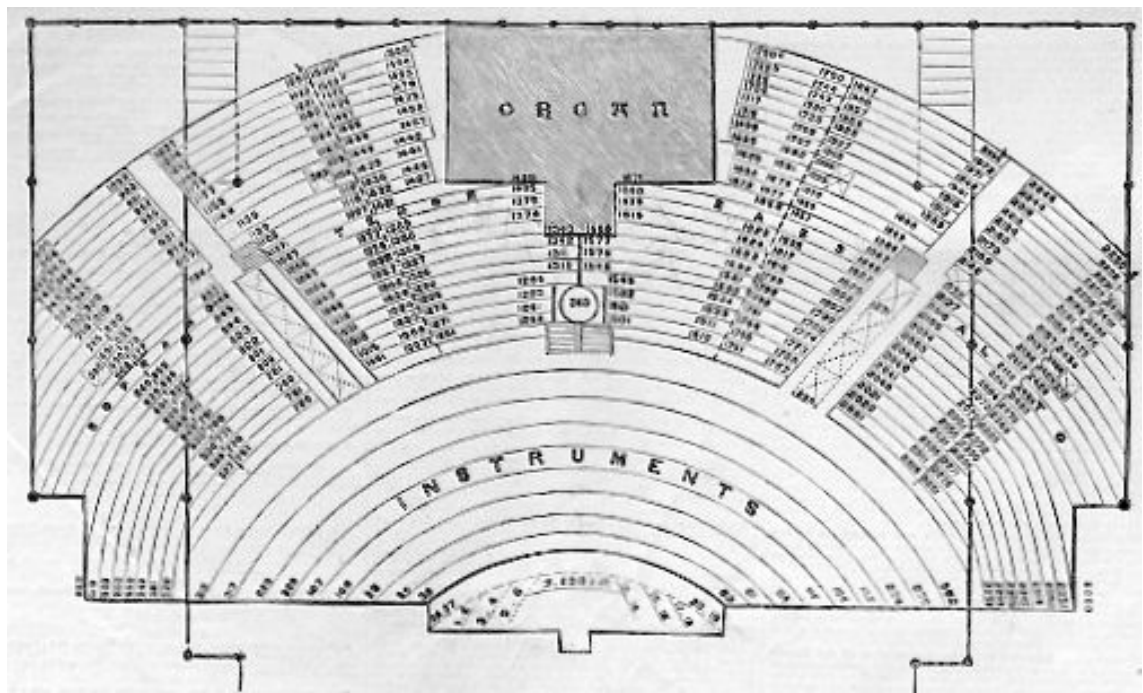


Fig. 4.13 Lay-out for the Handel Festival at the Crystal Palace Sydenham (*ILN*, 13 June 1857, 571).

of the architect (Paxton), on a 6000-square-foot stage, with a 42-foot rake so that everyone could see the conductor.

This concert demonstrated Costa's ability to coordinate a large army of musicians and administrators. The musicians were channelled by 38 marshals and colour-coded so that they all knew their places. The complex map for seating the musicians in 1857 was remarkable enough to warrant printing in the *ILN* (Fig. 4.13). Chorus management on this scale raised tricky questions: How much space to allow to each singer? (21 inches.) How to deal with interlopers from the New Philharmonic who wanted to take part 'as a body'? (Separate entrances for audience and singers.) Should ladies be allowed to wear bonnets? (No.) The orchestra of 285 was carefully auditioned and separately rehearsed, with Costa personally attending those for the brass bands. Costa made frequent visits to Sydenham 'ascertaining the capability of the place for sound, likewise arranging the plans, the stand or seat of each instrument and allocating the individual spaces'. He

decreed which musicians should play in the quieter sections. His team also supervised the printing of the specially arranged scores, the provision of 300 uniform music stands and the transport of musicians and heavy instruments.

The programme was musically conservative – the National Anthem, the *Hallelujah* Chorus and Old Hundredth – but the audience of over 30,000 was treated to a magnificent state spectacle.¹⁴⁵ There were unsteady moments, especially at the opening of the Hallelujah Chorus, but ‘a few beats from Mr Costa...brought them up to the mark’. Victoria wrote that the performance was ‘led most beautifully by Mr Costa. I cannot describe the splendid effect of the music, it was beyond all description’.

Palmerston told the SHS that it was ‘the finest effect which Her Majesty has ever heard’.¹⁴⁶

The 1854 concert marked, for better or worse, a turning point in large-scale performances. It created the template for Costa’s handling of the Handel Festivals and other major state events (Chapter 8). Grove, writing in 1884, implied that ‘the secret of Costa’s uniform success’ lay in his army of helpers:

At the zenith of his career, Sir Michael never moved without such men as Bowley, to prepare the whole scheme of the transaction for him, Sainton, Blagrove, Hill, Lucas, Howell, Pratten, Lazarus, the Harpers, Chipp and others of equal eminence at the principal desks, Peck and Henry Wright to distribute the parts. With the perfect organisation and efficient execution of such lieutenants, failure was impossible.¹⁴⁷

But Grove took for granted the new professionalism that Costa had embedded in the music industry over the previous forty years. Not the least of Costa’s qualities was his ability to attend to the details when necessary and thereafter to delegate to a self-reliant

¹⁴⁵ *Times* (12 June 1854).

¹⁴⁶ Palmerston-SHS (20 June 1854), Bowley, *Sacred Harmonic Society*, 34.

¹⁴⁷ Grove, ‘The Secret of Sir Michael Costa’s Success’, *Pall Mall Gazette* (1 May 1884).

support team. The composer Charles Willeby commented that ‘He liked a strong staff about him and he liked them to be self-reliant’.¹⁴⁸

4.3 The Conductor-Manager

Together with his extensive contractual powers (Chapter 5), these ingredients gave Costa a degree of authority that was unprecedented in England. It was the mixture of power and personality that enabled him to impose orchestral reforms that Laporte and Bochsa had failed to implement a few years earlier. Constructing his authority involved negotiating a fine line between musicians, who were insecure and under-paid, and managers, who were operating on a financial-legal tightrope and had good reason to fear bankruptcy. He made himself indispensable to both, as was clear from the frequent requests that he should resolve disputes between players and managers.

For the managers, he could persuade the musicians to work long and irregular hours for modest pay. It is a remarkable fact that, after 1838, Costa did not face any of the musicians’ strikes that had been frequent at the opera. Managers were also beholden to him for turning orchestras round in a very short time – a matter of a few weeks at the Philharmonic and the SHS – and for delivering good performances with a minimum of rehearsal. Underlying these benefits was the threat that he would move to a rival house and take the better musicians – and his box office appeal – with him (as he did in 1847 and 1871).

For the musicians, Costa’s strict discipline was reinforced by his control of access to the Philharmonic, private concerts and festivals, on which they depended to supplement their meagre opera salaries. But it was balanced by a sense that he was battling for their

¹⁴⁸ Charles Willeby, *Masters of English Music* (London: Osgood, 1893), 17-18.

welfare. William Kuhe was exaggerating when he credited Costa with transforming a mundane employment into ‘a vocation’:

If he could not raise their salaries, he at any rate contrived to raise their artistic worth...Orchestral players... came to be looked upon both by operatic managers and vocalists as artists entitled to a full measure of consideration and respect.¹⁴⁹

But Stanford, a more detached observer, agreed that ‘orchestral players had no warmer champion or friend. He fought their battles tooth and nail and raised their pay and their position in the profession’.¹⁵⁰ The *ILN* commented that ‘He was their champion as well as their conductor; and the hard-worked instrumentalist...knew that, while Costa wielded the baton, his earnings were secure from reduction and his valuable time was not occupied unnecessarily’.¹⁵¹ In this he differed from Habeneck, who was increasingly seen as an ally of the management.¹⁵²

The delicate balance was illustrated in Costa’s handling of the central issues of pay and numbers. He employed more players and choristers and at higher pay-rates than the opera managers and the Philharmonic Directors wanted. But his pay-scales were not unduly generous; several players refused to perform at the Philharmonic even at the increased salaries that he persuaded the Directors to offer. Moreover, his regime of discipline ensured that his orchestras delivered good value for money; Costa provided a reliability and continuity that, at least until the late 1850s, others could not match.

Most contemporary writers saw in Costa a combination of sympathy and severity, detecting benevolence behind his gruff autocratic manner. The critic Joseph Bennett wrote that ‘In battles with managers, he acted as the leader of his men and if, when they

¹⁴⁹ Kuhe, *Musical Recollections*, 58-9.

¹⁵⁰ Stanford, *Pages from an Unwritten Diary*, 206.

¹⁵¹ *ILN* (7 Feb. 1846), 98.

¹⁵² Southon, ‘L’émérgence de la figure de chef d’orchestre’, 149.

offended, there was little chance of escaping reprimand, there was equally small chance of being overlooked if they deserved approbation...'¹⁵³ Stanford remembered Costa as a martinet but 'for all his tyranny, a true friend of the orchestral player...Many were the great kindnesses which he did in secret to a young musician or a struggling artist'.¹⁵⁴ William Spark claimed that Costa paid for 'scores of impecunious, unfortunate members of his band' to take sea-side holidays.¹⁵⁵ John Ella recalled his many acts of generosity to 'the poor invalided chorister' and the 'member of his band in pecuniary difficulties'.¹⁵⁶ The weight of evidence goes well beyond conventional Victorian politesse.

Costa's friends went too far when they claimed that his players 'almost worshipped him' (Kuhe) and that he was 'the most popular *chef d'orchestre* that ever resided in England' (Spark).¹⁵⁷ The evidence points to respect rather than affection. Costa did not inspire the 'warmth and love' that Claudio Abbado defined as the key ingredient between conductor and players.¹⁵⁸ The *Musical Times* obituary observed: 'That he was absolutely loved by the orchestra cannot perhaps be said. He inspired respect and esteem, but also the fear with which a warmer feeling can hardly exist.'¹⁵⁹ Much was made of the warm reception he received from the players at concerts – for example when the players led ovations for him at the end of his first Philharmonic season.¹⁶⁰ But

¹⁵³ Bennett, *Forty Years*, 52.

¹⁵⁴ Stanford, *Interludes, Records and Reflections*, 35.

¹⁵⁵ Spark, *Musical Memories*, 9.

¹⁵⁶ Ella, *Musical Sketches*, 358.

¹⁵⁷ Kuhe, *Musical Recollections*, 57. Spark, *Musical Memories* (London: W Reeves, 1909), 2.

¹⁵⁸ Claudio Abbado interview with BBC Radio 4, 10 Oct. 2011.

¹⁵⁹ *Musical Times* (1 June 1884), 321.

¹⁶⁰ *ILN* (4 July 1846), 11.

the remarkable loyalty which he inspired was reinforced by powerful sanctions. There may be some truth in the violinist Tollebecque's claim that those who followed Costa from Her Majesty's to Covent Garden in 1847 did so to protect their work opportunities elsewhere (though the *Morning Chronicle* pointed out the 'staunch veterans' who stayed behind had not been offered posts in the new Covent Garden orchestra).¹⁶¹

Costa's overall achievement was to meld into an effective system separate ideas that were beginning to be applied on the Continent. It is right to treat them as a system because, although they were introduced piecemeal, he applied them systematically in all the institutions where he conducted. In 1846, his friend Gruneisen announced that 'he has established a system of conducting with the baton that is unequalled even in the most celebrated continental bands'.¹⁶² This helped to set a template for orchestras across England.

Costa's authority at the opera house extended beyond the orchestra and chorus. His contract described him as 'Superintendent of the *mise-en-scène*'. He put a broad interpretation on the clause in his contract that 'Mr Gye is to cause the Orders of Mr Costa for the Services of the Theatre *in all matters committed as above to his charge* to be respected and obeyed.' His remit included the appointment of the *maestro al piano*, the chorus master and the copyist. But there was a tendency to exaggerate Costa's power, as when the *Times* critic wrote in 1837 that 'he could command with absolute power not only scenes, dresses and decorations, but could exact from his orchestra and chorus as much drilling as he found necessary for his purpose'.¹⁶³ Although the *Musical World* observed that Costa 'ruled not only the orchestra, but also the stage: actors,

¹⁶¹ Tollebecque-*Times* (4 Jan. 1847). *Morning Chronicle* (5 Jan. 1847). 'Staunch veterans' in *MW* (23 Jan. 1847), 47.

¹⁶² *Morning Post* (16 March 1846).

¹⁶³ *Times* (19 May 1837).

machinists, scene-shifters and all subordinates came under his surveillance', he found himself increasingly in competition with the new professionals of stage management.¹⁶⁴ Their respective boundaries became a major source of conflict during the 1860s (Chapter 7).

There was an element of pragmatic continuity in Costa's reforms. He continued briefly the practice of placing the bass and cello leads at the centre in front of him, perhaps as a gesture to the veterans Dragonetti and Lindley. Inevitably, in an age when conducting methods were still evolving and subject to experiment, some of his reforms did not survive him (Chapter 10). Costa's system needs to be viewed in the context of the similar systems that other conductors were building up on the Continent and the growing professionalism that was affecting every aspect of the music industry.

Conducting – like music publishing, journalism and the management of concerts – was becoming a separate branch of an increasingly specialised business. The wider context was thus favourable to change and reform. Costa happened to be the man in that generation in England who had the authority, the personality and the longevity to systemise reforms in all of the main London orchestras. How far he was able to use his system to become a successful conductor is the subject of Chapter 5.

¹⁶⁴ *MW* (12 Feb. 1848), 99.

Chapter 5: Costa as a Conductor

As the first major figure who aspired to become a conductor without credentials as a composer (like Weber, Spontini, Spohr and Mendelssohn) or an instrumentalist (like Habeneck and Halle), Costa was obsessively mindful of his authority and status.

5.1 Contractual power

He attached high importance to the details of his written contracts. Charles Santley recalled being reprimanded by him for accepting a part at Covent Garden on the basis of an oral understanding with Gye: ‘never do business with the theatre without having all arrangements reduced to writing’.¹ This was his guiding principle when negotiating the details of his own contracts, which encapsulated the balance of power between him and his employers (Appendix A).²

Despite the absence of any contract from the 1830s, it can be assumed that he built up the core of his authority during Laporte’s lax regime. A letter from Laporte in 1838 shows Costa effectively running the company in the manager’s absence.³ One insight into the process by which he accumulated power comes from Costa’s battle for the right to appoint the librarian/copyist. John Ella’s diary records long delays in rehearsals while parts were corrected, after Laporte replaced the resident copyist by ‘persons totally unfit for the employ’. A rehearsal of *Beatrice di Tenda* was ‘abruptly terminated...owing to the imperfect condition of the parts’.⁴ By the time of his first extant contract with Lumley in 1845, Costa had secured control over all appointments on the music side. But

¹ Santley, *Student and Singer*, 181.

² Gye’s rigorous approach to other musicians’ contracts is illustrated in Ringel and Dideriksen, 10.

³ Costa-Laporte (28 March 1838), RAM 2006.939. Appendix A.

⁴ Ella Diary, 24 June and 17 March 1836. Details in Appendix A.

he was not satisfied until he forced Gye to write explicitly into his 1867 contract that he had the exclusive right to name the librarian/copyist.

Under his 1845 contract, ‘all the personnel of the opera’ came under ‘the immediate command (*direction* in French) of Mr Costa’. Lumley undertook to ‘give the necessary instructions so that Mr Costa’s arrangements for the functioning of the Opera can be facilitated and respected by all the members of the Italian Opera’. Costa also had control over ‘rehearsals in the theatre foyer and the *mise-en-scène*’.⁵

At Covent Garden from 1847, the fact that Costa was a founder member of the company (two years before Gye’s arrival) enabled him to buttress the authority he had built up at Her Majesty’s. Within a decade, he had an unprecedented range of powers, including the right to ban outsiders from piano rehearsals, six weeks’ notice of all new operas, and control over the pay and contracts of the musicians. Gye’s attempts to wrest back some of these powers soured their relations in the 1860s and culminated in their split in 1869.

Status was especially important at the Philharmonic, where Costa had previously been black-balled and where the orchestra tended to follow its entrenched leaders rather than the part-time ‘conductors’. No Philharmonic contract has survived. But, in a departure from the past, he took charge of all eight concerts. He predictably demanded the authority he already enjoyed at the opera. ‘Long experience in the Direction of the Opera has convinced me that, to ensure the perfect performance of any composition, the entire command of the band is necessary’.⁶ His main conditions were that he should have sole command of the orchestra, with the post of leader abolished; performers

⁵ Contract in French in the collection of the late Tony Gasson. Printed in Appendix A.

⁶ Costa-Hogarth (11 and 13 Aug. 1845), BL Loan 48. 13/7.

should not be absent from rehearsals without his permission; and the Directors should pledge to support him in the strict discipline of the orchestra.

The fact that Costa specified these conditions shows that they were not normal practice at the Philharmonic. This is confirmed by a *Musical World* report that ‘*In future there will be no leader at these concerts... The direction of the orchestra will be vested solely in the conductor, as at the Opera House*’.⁷ Chorley saw it as a significant innovation that Costa had the powers that had been denied to Mendelssohn, Moscheles or Sterndale Bennett.⁸ The Directors tried to resist Costa’s conditions and conceded only when he made clear that he would not accept the post otherwise. It appears however that they retained control over the Society’s programmes and over the contracts of ‘the artists, vocal and instrumental’, leaving Costa with the power to dismiss ‘for misconduct or incompetence’.⁹

He was better placed to dictate terms at the SHS, where his Opera orchestra provided the nucleus. He made his habitual demand for ‘supreme authority’, querying only:

whether...the amateur members of the orchestra would place themselves as unreservedly under the sway of his baton and would attend rehearsals as diligently as the professional members, over whom he was accustomed to exercise the strictest control.¹⁰

Total control at the festivals was of course essential, given the need to galvanise large numbers of amateurs from so many different choirs (Chapter 8).

⁷ *MW* (7 May 1846), 112.

⁸ *Athenaeum* (3 Jan. 1846), 18.

⁹ *Morning Chronicle* (5 Jan. 1847).

¹⁰ F.G. Edwards, *Musical Haunts of London* (London: Curwen, 1895), 25. Cox, *Musical Recollections*, vol. 2, 60.

mentioning the conductor. Costa was not included on the playbill, even when conducting his own works (Figs 5.1/3). During his time at Her Majesty's, there appears to have been only one mention of Costa on the playbill: on 14 May 1835 when he featured as 'Director of the Music, Composer and Conductor'. At Covent Garden and benefit concerts, by contrast, he was frequently listed as composer and conductor (Fig. 5.4).

5.2 Conducting style

Costa's style reflected his personality as described in Chapter 2. Undemonstrative by nature, he conducted unostentatiously but firmly. His manner was summed up by Henry Davison as 'the embodiment of calm collected will, without the least show and ostentation'.¹¹ Bennett remarked on his 'calm dignity'. The *Musical World* wrote that, in reducing English orchestras to order and discipline, 'he did not bluster. A few quiet words and the matter in hand was settled without appeal'.¹² For the *Times* obituary, his hallmark was his quiet decisiveness: 'Calm, cool and full of resource, he evaded danger and got on the safe side of it before many conductors would have made up their mind what to do'.¹³

Many observers commented on his presence of mind, which enabled him to rescue performances by bringing the players or singers back together after a false entry. 'Of Sir Michael's presence of mind and dexterity, it is impossible to speak too highly'.¹⁴ Chorley reported that, during a shaky appearance by the soprano Favanti in *Don Giovanni* in 1840, 'thanks to Signor Costa, the orchestra and her comrades leaped over

¹¹ Davison, *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*, 108. Bennett, *Forty Years*, 109.

¹² *Musical Times* (1 June 1884), 321.

¹³ *Times* (30 March 1884).

¹⁴ *Times* (30 March 1884).

her, so as to cover her incapacity...'¹⁵ The *ILN* noticed that, in Mendelssohn's *St Paul*, when some of the SHS chorus mistook the beat during the chorus 'This is Jehovah's temple':

it was astonishing with what presence of mind and promptitude the conductor pulled through the difficulty and restored order...This result proves how much depends on the moral and intellectual influence of the musician who wields the baton.¹⁶

Stanford recalled that, when he was struggling to rehearse a movement in triple time, which ended with a long accelerando, Costa had rescued him with a prod and a whisper of 'one beat will do it'. The successful application of this advice was followed by another prod and 'a most un-Costa-like wink'.¹⁷

Davison linked his skill in bringing an orchestra or choir back into line to his 'amazingly quick ear, decision, promptitude'.¹⁸ One story that became a staple illustration for Victorian church sermons related how he stopped a rehearsal during a particularly loud section to enquire why one of the piccolos was not playing. As early as 1836, the *Morning Post* remarked that 'his naturally quick and intelligent method of detecting, and above all of correcting, mistakes has a marvellous faculty of inspiring confidence among his troops'.¹⁹ Santley attributed this to his unusual habit in rehearsal of reading scores a bar behind the musicians: 'it is much easier to correct mistakes after hearing them than before.'²⁰ For performances, however, he appears to have relied on meticulous preparation and a good memory. The *Musical World* commented on his

¹⁵ Chorley, *Musical Recollections*, 158.

¹⁶ *ILN* (19 Jan. 1850), 42. See also *Times* (12 Jan. 1850).

¹⁷ Stanford, *Pages from an Unwritten Diary*, 202-3.

¹⁸ *MW* (21 Aug. 1847), 538.

¹⁹ *Morning Post* (March 1836).

²⁰ Santley, *Student and Singer*, 149.

‘most retentive memory, if we may judge from the manner in which he has accompanied a variety of vocal compositions during the past season, without a copy’.²¹

Overall, Costa scored highly on the qualities demanded of the early professional conductors by the first theoretician of conducting, Kastner: musicality, perspicacity, sang-froid, perseverance, patience and firmness.²² This combination was later seen as inadequate, as the unshowy models of Spohr (who conducted ‘without the slightest contortion of countenance’), Weber (‘quiet and undemonstrative’) and Mendelssohn gave way to the late Romantic fashion for more demonstrative and interpretative conducting.²³

5.3 Technique

Central to Costa’s technique were his power of communication and clarity of beat.

5.3.1 Communication

The first edition of Grove’s *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1879-89), held out the clarity of Costa’s communication as an ideal: ‘For many years there was not, in all England, an orchestral player of any reputation who did not comprehend the meaning of the slightest motion of his hand.’²⁴ He was helped in this by his unprecedented continuity in charge of opera orchestra, where there was an unusually low turnover.²⁵ Such continuity of conductor and players, unique in England in the 1830s and 1840s, was later a feature of the successful orchestras under Halle and Manns.

21 *MW* (26 Aug. 1836), 175.

22 G Kastner, Supplement to *Cours d’Instrumentation* (1844) cited in Carse, *Beethoven to Berlioz*, 338.

23 E.L. Gerber, *Lexikon der Tonkünstler* (Leipzig: 1790-2) and *Wiener Allgemeine Musik Zeitung* (1822), 174 both cited in Carse, *Beethoven to Berlioz*, 341.

24 Grove 1 under ‘Conducting’.

25 Ringel, 34.

Familiarity and clarity enabled Costa to convey unambiguously the effects he sought.

Early in his time at the Philharmonic, the *ILN* critic noted that Costa was the only conductor, apart from Habeneck, who possessed:

the extraordinary faculty...of communicating his own feelings to his troops, inspiring them with his zeal, encouraging the timid, rebuking the too daring, rousing the sluggish...as if the spirit of the composer himself were animating the masses.²⁶

The *Musical World* commented that, in the opera house, he was the master spirit of the band and could do as he pleased with it.²⁷ In his first year with the Philharmonic:

The effect of Signor Costa's presence seemed to have magnetised the whole orchestra. A wave of his arm and the expression he required were simultaneous. The secret of conveying his own feelings to the orchestra under his control has seldom been more thoroughly exemplified by a conductor.²⁸

The frequent references to Costa's 'magnetic' hold over the players suggests that there was more to his conducting than mechanical time-beating. Henry Davison credited him (and Jullien) with having 'that special, perhaps magnetic, power of holding together and swaying numbers of men'.²⁹ Herman Klein drew on the same metaphor: 'The masterful Neapolitan exerted an extraordinary magnetic control over his singers; he had the power of infusing into them an irresistible rhythm and real dynamic energy.'³⁰ It was this energy (what the *Examiner* called his 'gusto') that enabled him to re-animate the orchestra when he took over Spohr's *Faust* from the elderly composer.³¹ In these respects, Costa resembled Mendelssohn who was said to communicate 'as if by an electric fluid' and demonstrated what Berlioz described as the 'almost indefinable gifts

²⁶ *ILN* (17 Feb. 1849), 101.

²⁷ *MW* (5 April 1838), 236 and (24 April 1845), 181.

²⁸ *MW* (21 March 1846), 131.

²⁹ Davison, *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*, 109.

³⁰ Klein, *Musicians and Mimmers*, 133.

³¹ *Examiner* (29 April 1838). *ILN* (7 Aug. 1852), 98.

without which an invisible link cannot establish itself between him and those he directs'.³²

5.3.2 Beat

Many early conductors, such as Musard, used an exaggerated beat, often marking each note – a legacy perhaps from the old *batteur de mesure* and the military bandmaster.

Costa too was criticised early in his career for an over-emphatic beat, though the *Musical World* added that his ability to indicate 'the smallest fraction of a bar' was a fault which 'leans in the right direction'.³³ The *Examiner* in 1838 compared him to a marionette, referring to:

his incessant motion of head, hands and arms; it does not appear like beating time, there is no regularity in it, but it attracts notice as do the movements of the figures, which throw out legs and arms when the string is pulled.³⁴

The first edition of Grove stated that he modified and revolutionised the method of beating time in England.³⁵ Like virtually all early conductors, he was initially accused of stamping his feet. He was even reported to hum and sing when performers faltered.³⁶ In 1838, the *Musical World* described his mode of conducting 'somewhat de trop prononcee'.³⁷ But as he acquired tighter control, he was able to refine his baton-technique. By 1863 the *Examiner* commended him for showing 'his usual firmness but no stikulation (sic) of the empiric Jullien school'; the *Graphic* later wrote that he led 'by sympathy and power of character, not by the stick; indeed his baton hardly ever rises

³² Hueffer, *Half a century of Music*, 44. Berlioz, Supplement to *Traité*, 245.

³³ *MW* (14 June 1838), 118.

³⁴ *Examiner* (22 April 1838).

³⁵ Grove 1 under 'Conducting'.

³⁶ Costa in *Examiner* (22 April 1838); stamping in *Graphic* (21 Dec. 1872); humming etc in *Morning Post* (1 June 1843 and 29 April 1874).

³⁷ *MW* (14 June 1838), 111.

above his music; he seems merely to use it, as another would his forefinger, just to point or indicate.’³⁸

In choral concerts, Costa communicated through a clear beat, combining vigorous strokes of the baton with more fluid gestures with his left arm. Stanford recalled that, since rehearsals were both few in number, much had to be left to chance and a ‘belief in Field-Marshal Costa’s right arm’.³⁹ Shaw, often critical of Costa, praised ‘the pointed steady unwavering beat of Costa who...never allowed the threads of the orchestral loom to become entangled’.⁴⁰ All commentators agreed that he was, in Vaughan Williams’ phrase, ‘a very fine band-master’. This was a source of praise while English orchestras still needed to be whipped into shape and the simple beat patterns of Spohr’s *Violin Schule* (1831) set the standard. By the 1850s, when Berlioz was developing his more complex and fluid system and Liszt was merely marking the accents, the label of ‘time-beater’ became a term of abuse.⁴¹ Berlioz, for example, said that Costa did not so much beat time as ‘thresh it’. But this was a common jibe between conductors: Berlioz himself was accused by Wagner of sinking into ‘the commonest rut of the vulgar time-beater’.⁴²

For Costa’s generation, clear time-beating remained a central ingredient of conducting. But as an acknowledged master of the Italian repertoire, he was familiar with the need for flexible tempi, especially rallentandos, fermatas and different tempi for repeats. It took longer to convince the critics that he was not importing the bad habits of the Italian

³⁸ *Examiner* (25 April 1863). *Graphic* (15 April 1876).

³⁹ Stanford, *Pages from an Unwritten Diary*, 110.

⁴⁰ *Shaw’s Music*, vol. 2, 322.

⁴¹ *Le chef d’orchestre: théorie de son art*. Supplement to *Traité* (1855). On Liszt, see *Figaro* (18 Feb. 1843).

⁴² Wagner, *My Life*, 628; and A.W. Ganz, *Berlioz in London*, 108.

opera house into performances of the German classics. Reviews of his first year at the Philharmonic went out of their way to stress that he was not ‘metronomic’, a sign perhaps that he was widely suspected of being so (Chapter 8).

In the opera house and the Philharmonic, Costa used what became the normal English on-the-note beat, rather than the habit, which became common in German opera houses, of beating just before the note.⁴³ For handling large-scale choral performances, however, he had to adopt a different technique, especially in the cavernous Crystal Palace, where there was an obvious time gap between Costa’s baton and the entry of the choir. Here, after much experimenting, Costa developed a broader beat, with a clearer and earlier signal. With this and his efficient rehearsal regime, he achieved a precision that amazed audiences, without having to adopt the system of sub-conductors and Verbruggen’s electric metronome used, for example, by Berlioz.⁴⁴

A fair judgement would be that Costa provided the clarity and predictability that English orchestras and choruses most needed in the 1830s and that this initially involved a heavy beat. In the mid-1850s, when Wagner was confusing the Philharmonic with his erratic time-keeping, Costa supplied the precision and steadiness on which the players depended. In the 1860s, he was the only person capable of galvanising the grand choral festivals. But his four-square technique no doubt contributed to his later image as a metronomic time-beater. By the end of his career, the *Times*, commenting on his ‘singularly decisive’ beat, observed that ‘he may sometimes have gone too far in this direction’.⁴⁵

⁴³ New Grove 2, 272.

⁴⁴ Cairns, *Berlioz*, vol. 2, 562.

⁴⁵ *Times* (30 April 1884).

5.3.3 Tempo

Reports on Costa's tempi are contradictory. According to Shaw, he 'erred on the side of slowness'. But the evidence points rather to his erring on the fast side. Sterndale Bennett wrote sarcastically to Davison in 1836 that, if Costa took over the Philharmonic, 'the only advantage would be that we might hear the whole of Beethoven's symphonies in one night and still have time to spare for supper'.⁴⁶ Chorley commented that 'Signor Costa, in the excess of his spirit, pushes on the orchestra with so much vigour that many of the pieces are made to end in an unintelligible *prestissimo* where an *accelerando* was required'.⁴⁷ The *Times* wrote that Costa's 'only fault as a conductor...was a tendency...to make his orchestra go faster than was conveniently practical'.⁴⁸ The corollary was that he brought 'a plain, bold and decided outline, filled in with vivid colours...He was never seen to more advantage than when riding on the whirlwind and directing the storm.'⁴⁹

Visiting composers saw hurried conducting as part of Mendelssohn's legacy. Wagner claimed that, when he took over Costa's Philharmonic, 'every *allegro* ended as an undisputed *presto*...the Mendelssohnian mode of rendering had confessedly been raised into a fixed tradition'.⁵⁰ Costa's approach seems to have had much in common with the belief, attributed by Wagner to Mendelssohn, that 'a too slow tempo was the devil and for choice he would rather things were taken too fast'. Meyerbeer, while praising

⁴⁶ Bennett-Davison (24 Nov. 1836), Davison, *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*, 30.

⁴⁷ *Athenaeum* (2 May 1835), 339.

⁴⁸ *Times* (12 Jan. 1850 and 16 March 1847).

⁴⁹ *MW* (3 May 1884), 274-5.

⁵⁰ Wagner, *On Conducting*, trans. Dannreuther (London: 1897), 22.

Costa's conducting of *Le prophète*, felt that he took it 'too fast, as is the custom in England' – prompting John Ella's shrewd reply that 'in England, time is money'.⁵¹

5.4 Aesthetics

5.4.1 Interpretation

In the first half of Costa's career, calls for flexible pacing and original readings were rare. Most conductors were preoccupied with the need to achieve the degree of precision and cohesion necessary to perform the new repertoire of Beethoven, Weber and Mendelssohn. Conducting in this period was marked by the brisk efficient style associated with Mendelssohn, Spontini and Habeneck, which was believed to have originated in the 'naive allegro' attributed by Beethoven to Mozart. Their method was characterised by a metronomic beat, fast tempi and a concern to treat the score literally. As a tolerable level of orchestral discipline came to be taken for granted, this approach was challenged by a new aesthetic and the related demand for interpretations that brought out the inner intentions of the composer. The most vigorous advocate of the new aesthetic was Wagner, who combined his own *tempo rubato* theories with the claim to be continuing the 'elastic beat' (*elastischer Takt*) advocated by Beethoven. In the ideological debate about the Music of the Future, the difference between these two schools was over-polarised.⁵² Vaughan Williams contrasted, as 'diametrically opposed to each other', the Mendelssohnian style of the first half of the nineteenth-century (when *tempo rubato* was held 'in abhorrence' and 'a fairly correct performance was all that a conductor expected of his players') with the modern style (guided by Wagner's ideas of interpretative freedom and flexible tempi, where 'correctness is the minimum

⁵¹ Quoted in Spark, *Musical Memories*, 57.

⁵² For a fuller discussion of this classification and its deficiencies, see Gunther Schuller, *The Compleat Conductor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), Part II.

from which [the conductor] starts’).⁵³ The prestige of the brilliant succession of conductors who developed Wagner’s ideas (Richter, von Bülow, Nikitsch, Hermann Levi, Felix Mottl and Anton Seidl) encouraged a tendency to disparage the older school. Wagner, who had been astonished by Spontini’s ‘exceptionally precise, fiery and superbly organised’ conducting in 1836, later described him (and Mendelssohn and Habeneck) as cold and uninspired.

In this polarised view of conducting, Costa was inevitably associated with the older style. Wagner predictably complained to Liszt that Costa’s Philharmonic did not have a distinctive style and the fire of inspiration (‘le feu sacré’); it was a ‘skilled machine which I can never really get going’.⁵⁴ To his wife Minna, he described it as too machine-like – ‘like Geneva music-boxes’. At the time, this would have been taken in England as a compliment. The notion that a conductor should give novel interpretations beyond what appeared in the score did not harm Costa during his hey-day, when clarity and precision were seen as the supreme virtues. Comparisons with Mendelssohn and Habeneck were still a mark of praise; and showy display had been discredited, for many, by the antics of Jullien. Even during the second half of his career (1850-80) the aesthetics of Wagner and Liszt were less influential, at least in England, than those of Verdi, Halevy, Auber and Meyerbeer. In this repertoire, Costa was widely praised by the mainstream critics for reflecting, rather than re-interpreting, the score. Joseph Bennett commented that:

No one...will ever write a chapter on Costa’s “readings”...His career was practically over when the new style of interpretative conductor, charged with finding new ideas in old scores, made his appearance. Costa had no such mission. He read the music as he saw it, without trying to read into it.⁵⁵

⁵³ Grove 2, vol. 1, 402.

⁵⁴ Christiansen, *The Visitors* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2000), 24. Wagner-Liszt (16 May 1855).

⁵⁵ Joseph Bennett, *Forty Years*, 53.

The *Musical World* obituary confirmed this picture:

Sir Michael made no pretence to the elaboration and finesse which have come in with a passion for ‘readings’ – in other words for attempts at setting upon the music of the composer the stamp of the conductor... If he took in hand a symphony of Beethoven, he presented it just as it lay in the score, reproducing the master’s recorded ideas, without seeking to put upon them a gloss of his own.⁵⁶

This was incidentally what many composers, including Costa’s friend Rossini, demanded. Verdi wrote ‘I cannot concede the right to “create” to singers or conductors’; Brahms said ‘If I had wanted it, I should have written it in’.⁵⁷

Here, as in other aspects of conducting, Costa was a successful product of his period, lauded for performances that, in their precision and control, were revelatory by comparison with what had gone before. In the second half of his career, however, his virtues came to be seen as aesthetic liabilities. His image was briefly dented by the verve and vision which Berlioz brought to the New Philharmonic in 1852. There were suggestions that Costa was not only untouched by the new aesthetics but that he lacked inspiration. Shaw described him as ‘cold’.⁵⁸ A combination of factors added to the image of a man who was not only older than virtually everyone else on the musical scene, but also increasingly out-of-date: his abandonment of the prestigious symphonic repertoire; his association with the conservative programmes of the opera and choral worlds; his link to the unfashionable school of Mendelssohn; and his survival into a very different aesthetic world (Chapter 10).

5.4.2 Volume

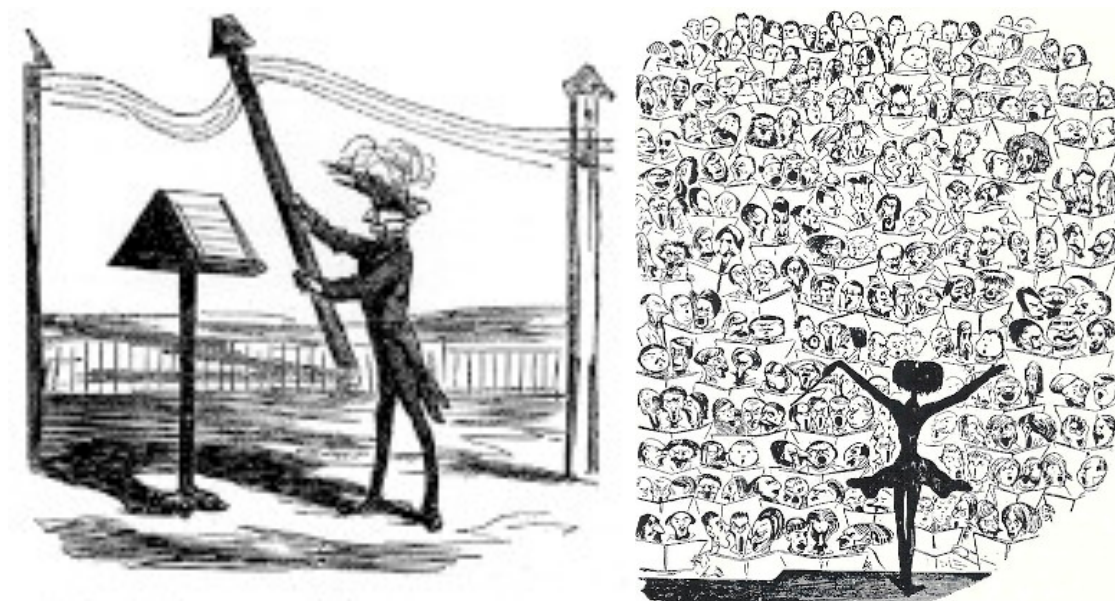
It was a common complaint about mid-nineteenth-century conductors that they allowed their orchestras, now larger and equipped with more powerful brass and woodwind, to

⁵⁶ *MW* (3 May 1884), 274-5.

⁵⁷ Schuller, *The Compleat Conductor*, 86.

⁵⁸ *Shaw’s Music*, vol. 2, 102.

play too loudly. Habeneck in Paris and Spontini in Berlin were regularly criticised for this, as were Berlioz and Wagner (Figs 5.5/6).



Figs 5.5/6 Caricatures of Berlioz.

Noise was a charge frequently associated with Costa and Jullien (Figs 5.7/8). Reviewing *Le siège de Corinthe* in 1837, the *Examiner* commented that:

there is little but braying of trumpets, beating of drums, clashing of cymbals: the whole of the orchestra playing fortissimo; the whole of the performers, principals and chorus, roaring like Bottoms's nightingales.. Signor Costa...has become altogether a nuisance that must positively be abated.⁵⁹



Figs 5.7/8 Caricatures of Costa, 'our lightning conductor' (*Punch*, 3 June 1882) and Jullien (*ILN*, 1849, 136).

⁵⁹ *Examiner* (15 June 1834).

The *Times* also harped on Costa's 'predilection for the noisy' and complained that his orchestra 'is growing too ambitious'; Costa had not yet learnt the 'nice distinction between loudness and noise.'⁶⁰

Later in his career, Costa showed that he was capable of extracting *piano* as well as *fortissimo* effects. In 1848, Hogarth remarked that the Philharmonic players were in seventh heaven because he had 'established that a real *piano* was to be obtained from an English band'.⁶¹ Critics and soloists regularly praised his skill in adapting the orchestra to the needs of the singer. Hogarth also noted that, instead of the normal practice of thinning the violins to accompany Mozart arias, Costa included all of them, 'and yet such a *piano* was preserved that the voice of the singer was fully sustained and not drowned as formerly'.⁶²

But overall, Costa remained, in Joseph Bennett's words, 'a noisy conductor':

'Trombones were more dear to him than any other instrument in the orchestra.'⁶³

Wagner and Stanford both commented that his orchestras mainly played *mezzoforte*.⁶⁴

The *Musical World* contrasted Costa's hostility to *piano* markings with the real *pianissimos* that Berlioz obtained from the New Philharmonic.⁶⁵ This was increasingly seen as a fault by critics who judged conductors on their ability to persuade large orchestras to play softly.

⁶⁰ *Times* (26 March 1838 and 12 April 1837).

⁶¹ *ILN* (4 July 1846), 11.

⁶² *ILN* (21 March 1846), 193.

⁶³ Joseph Bennett, *Forty Years*, 335.

⁶⁴ Wagner, *On Conducting*, 306-10. Stanford, *Interludes, Records and Reflections*, 32; and *Pages from an Unwritten Diary*, 203-4.

⁶⁵ *MW* (27 March 1852),

At the festivals, where volume was regarded as one aspect of the Sublime, grandiose performances were a matter of national pride (Chapter 8). The *Examiner* commented that the loss of nuance at the Handel Festival was more than compensated by the overpowering sound and effect.⁶⁶ Here as elsewhere Costa was a man of his times. Writing to his librettist Bartholomew's wife with tickets for a concert at Exeter Hall in 1862, Costa stressed the size of the orchestra she would hear: 288 strings and 100 woodwind.⁶⁷ Spark recorded Costa's enthusiasm for the basses at the Bradford Festival 'like a troop of organ pedal pipes'.⁶⁸ As he came to symbolise the mid-Victorian penchant for the gargantuan, this became another respect in which Costa, as the last survivor from the world of the 1830s, became the personification of its musical excesses.

5.5 The Protocol and Metaphors of Conducting

The rituals of conducting are a comparatively recent addition to Western art music. In 1830, there was no accepted 'common practice' for baton technique, rehearsal methodology or podium manner. The composer-conductors had their own personal approaches and their prestige usually enabled them to get by. But the professional conductors needed to show that they were making a contribution that justified interposing themselves between the audience and the orchestra. For this they had to demonstrate not only musical insight but also special technical skills.

This challenge, which eluded the old-style 'conductors' like Smart and Bishop, was first met in England by visiting foreigners and by Costa and Jullien. It helped that they could show that, in addition to being professional conductors, they possessed other musical

⁶⁶ *Examiner* (4 July 1874).

⁶⁷ Costa-Mrs Bartholomew (13 Aug. 1862), RCMA 3012.

⁶⁸ Spark, *Musical Memoirs*, 3.

qualifications. Costa and Jullien made much of their status as composers. Jullien nearly always included his own recent gavottes or polkas in his programmes and it was an important part of Costa's title that he was 'Conductor, Musical Director and *Composer*'. In addition, Costa performed at the pianoforte and Jullien played a wide range of instruments that he would snatch from nearby players. They also contributed, though in very different ways, to the evolving protocol of conducting.

First, the conductor took on some of the image of the recently lionised instrumental virtuosi, becoming a virtuoso himself in his use of body language and gesture – what Deldevez later called '*le langage du chef d'orchestreune sorte de langue muette*'.⁶⁹ Jullien exploited this image through his extravagant dress, his acceptance of a jewel-encrusted baton on a tasselled cushion, and his habit of ending a piece by sinking exhausted into his conductor's armchair. Although the cognoscenti were repelled by this exhibitionism, it helped to impress the gullible that conducting was a vital part of music-making. Costa came nearer to satisfying sober English taste by demonstrating his ability to control large forces with a minimum of gesture and fuss. While Jullien sought to be the star of the show, Costa presented himself as the efficient manager of the labour force.

Second, the conductor began to assume a shamanic role, as the person who could bring the music's silent notation to life. He acquired 'the charisma of his priestly office', presenting the works of absent composers to a passive and now silent audience through the medium of anonymously dressed players.⁷⁰ Habeneck's ability to act the music led to his being compared to the leading French stage actor, Talma.⁷¹ As Davison noticed,

⁶⁹ Deldevez, *L'Art du Chef d'Orchestre*, 99.

⁷⁰ Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 439.

⁷¹ Southon, 'L'émergence de la figure du chef d'orchestre', 116.

people went to see Jullien as well as to hear him – ‘the picturesque conductor, who...not only conducted but acted’.⁷² Costa, the antithesis of the flamboyant Jullien, learnt to avoid such extravagance, which provoked mirth rather than respect. Reports of the opening of the Albert Hall in 1871 made fun of his opera cloak, his blue and gold court dress and a sword, which caused him considerable embarrassment. Instead, he exploited the notion that he, rather than the orchestra, was the creator of the music. The *Musical World* in 1847 remarked that Costa extracted every nuance of expression ‘as though the entire orchestra were but one instrument, on which *he himself performed alone*’.⁷³

Third, as scores became sacrosanct, the conductor began to be seen as the mediator who, by personifying the composer, brought his work into existence. Alastair Williams describes how the conductor can be seen as a supplement in Derrida’s sense: ‘someone in direct contact with lofty musical ideals that are unleashed at the flick of a stick, yet because they are mediated through him they are more contingent than they might otherwise seem’.⁷⁴ As a conductor who was principally associated with the opera and the oratorio, Costa was less well-placed than Habeneck to stand as the interpreter of the orchestral classics, but he credibly took on the role of mediator when he conducted the works most associated with him (Rossini, Meyerbeer, Handel and later Verdi).

Fourth, the conductor personified the orchestra, whose members became increasingly anonymous. Both Berlioz and Habeneck were described as ‘playing’ their orchestras. It was equally true of Costa and Jullien who remained with their orchestras for many

⁷² Davison, *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*, 109.

⁷³ *MW* (10 April 1847), 236-8.

⁷⁴ Alastair Williams, *Constructing Musicology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 38.

years. In a way that was unimaginable in England a generation earlier, his players were referred to as ‘Costa’s orchestra’ and even his ‘myrmidons’.⁷⁵

Finally, the conductor was increasingly driven, as Heinrich Schenker noted in the mid-1890s, to communicate visually to a wider audience that could not easily follow the new music merely by hearing. He provided visual assistance by demonstrating the music, so that the audience witnessed as well as heard its realisation. D’Ortigue noticed that Habeneck’s conducting involved an element of ‘pantomime’.⁷⁶ As these visual aspects became more significant, the conductor attracted a personality cult. Costa became, as the opera singers had long been, a star. He was the first London conductor to receive curtain calls at the opera. His portraits were widely reproduced; and female members of the Birmingham Festival choir petitioned for his gloves to be cut up as mementoes.

The protocol of conducting is closely connected with its metaphors. As the orchestra took shape in the eighteenth century, it was compared in particular to two metaphorical source domains: those of civil society and the army.⁷⁷ The metaphors associated with composer-conductors carried notions of creative power but also of direction. Gounod, an occasional composer-conductor, saw himself as ‘the driver of the coach’.⁷⁸ Berlioz viewed the orchestra as ‘an immense keyboard, played by the conductor under the direction of the composer’, with the players reduced to the status of instruments or machines.⁷⁹ The professional conductors too began to attract the metaphor of the

⁷⁵ *MW* (21 May 1853), 315. *Morning Post* (20 April 1843).

⁷⁶ Southon, ‘L’émergence de la figure du chef d'orchestre’, 127.

⁷⁷ Spitzer and Zaslaw, *Birth of the Orchestra*, chapter 14.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Goehr, *Imaginary Musical Museum*, 275.

⁷⁹ Berlioz, Supplement to *Traité*, 293. Southon, ‘L’émergence de la figure du chef d'orchestre’, 156.

manager who played his anonymous orchestra in order to convert the composer's silent notation into vibrant sound.

For Costa, as for Spontini and Habeneck, the military was the metaphor of choice. He used it himself, telling the Philharmonic Directors that, 'without the aid of good troops, no commander could be successful'.⁸⁰ The military metaphor favoured the Musical Director (with his phallic baton or 'truncheon'⁸¹) rather than the leader (who was, metaphorically speaking, merely a subordinate commander). Military images associated with Costa became one of the clichés of music-writing. He was 'a splendid drill-sergeant' (Grove), 'General Costa' (*ILN*), 'a Wellington' (*Musical Times*), 'GCO on his own territory' with 'the grip of a Field Marshal' (Stanford).⁸² In his resignation letter to Gye in 1869, he used the analogies of clockwork and the military: 'As well might it be expected that a clock should go with two springs or a battalion be commanded by two colonels.'⁸³

Costa attracted some newer metaphors. He was described as the 'great intelligence' and 'mastermind' of the Philharmonic; a scientist who 'set himself to raise the English orchestra from the condition of a concourse of atoms to that of a homogeneous body, subordinate to one will', even the leader of the players' trade union.⁸⁴ But the military metaphor predominated and continued to be applied to him long after conductors like von Bülow, Richter and Nikisch were attracting metaphors from nature with overtones

⁸⁰ *MW* (4 July 1846), 309. Also *ILN* (4 July 1846), 11.

⁸¹ *Morning Chronicle* (15 May 1837).

⁸² Graves, *George Grove*, 125; *ILN* (21 May 1846), 193; Stanford, *Pages from an Unwritten Diary*, 206; *Musical Times* (1 June 1884), 321-3.

⁸³ ROHC, Costa-Gye corr. (27 Jan. 1869).

⁸⁴ *ILN* (7 Feb. 1846), 98; Bennett, *Forty Years*, 51.

of creativity and artistic interpretation.⁸⁵ By his last decade, Costa was out of date metaphorically as well as artistically.

5.6 Comparisons with other Conductors and Orchestras

In the absence of extant recordings or of a reliable performance tradition, it is difficult to form an assessment of conducting in the mid-nineteenth-century. Music criticism and memoirs of the period are often unreliable witnesses. But there are several broad comparisons that can be made:

Comparison of Costa's orchestra at Her Majesty's with that of the Philharmonic before he took over there in 1846. This is revealing because the two orchestras contained many of the same players and the main difference was between the conductors – Costa at the Opera and Bishop, Smart, Loder and Moscheles at the Philharmonic. The *Musical World* noted the Philharmonic's 'inferiority in discipline and musical intelligence to the admirable corps of foreign and native talent comprising the Italian Opera band'.⁸⁶ It even commented that Costa's opera orchestra, with its fuller resources, performed the Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with greater effect than the Philharmonic under Mendelssohn himself.⁸⁷ It became a common boast that the Opera band was 'the best ever assembled in England'.⁸⁸ It was not until after Costa's second season at the Philharmonic that the *ILN* considered that it could 'compete in some degree with his matchless band at Covent Garden'.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ For the change in musical metaphors see Spitzer and Zaslaw, *The Birth of the Orchestra*, 520.

⁸⁶ *MW* (19 May 1839), 23.

⁸⁷ *MW* (24 April 1845), 181.

⁸⁸ Cox, *Musical Recollections*, vol. 2, 168.

⁸⁹ *ILN* (1 July 1848), 424.

Comparison of Costa's Covent Garden orchestra in the 1850s and 60s with that of Her

Majesty's. Costa had not only taken many of the best players with him to Covent

Garden in 1847, but he was also more skilful than Balfe in building up and retaining good players. The evidence for Covent Garden's superiority is set out in Chapter 6.

Even Berlioz, a friend of Balfe, could not disagree that the Covent Garden orchestra and chorus were superior to those of Her Majesty's.⁹⁰ When Gye and Mapleson planned to

amalgamate their two orchestras in 1869, the well-informed agent-impresario Jarrett

judged that Covent Garden's players were generally much better.⁹¹ When the two

houses performed the same operas, the comparison almost always favoured Costa over

Balfe and Arditi. In 1862, the *Times* wrote that 'To compare the *Huguenots* and *Robert le Diable* of Her Majesty's Theatre with [those] at another house would, under actual

circumstances, be absurd.'⁹² When Costa moved from Gye's to Mapleson's company in

1871, Shaw remarked that 'he had of course taken the orchestral supremacy with him'.⁹³

Comparison of performances of the same orchestra under Costa and other conductors.

Critics frequently noted that performance dropped when Costa was deputised at the

Philharmonic and SHS.⁹⁴ Davison blamed Costa's 'despotic monopoly' for the fact that

'Our orchestral performers will not pay the proper attention to other conductors'.⁹⁵

Shaw commented that 'If Sir Michael Costa could only realise the manner with which

his orchestra takes advantage of his absence, he would probably never entrust M

⁹⁰ *Feuilleton du Journal des Débats* (1 July 1851).

⁹¹ Gye 15 Feb 1869. Covent Garden's orchestra provided all five of the lead players in the amalgamated orchestra.

⁹² *Times* (1 Sept. 1862). See also George Eliot-François D'Albert-Durade (18 July 1863), ed. G.S. Haight, *The George Eliot Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 93.

⁹³ *Shaw's Music*, vol. 1, 498.

⁹⁴ *ILN* (17 May 1851), 416 and (23 Feb. 1850), 129.

⁹⁵ *MW* (29 July 1854), 504.

Sainton with the baton again.⁹⁶ There was a fall in orchestral standards at the Philharmonic and Covent Garden after Costa's departure. The *Daily News* noted that, when the players performed at the Liverpool Festival under Hermann, they were 'not quite themselves in the absence of Costa'.⁹⁷

Comparison with the major European orchestras. Little reliance can be placed on the comments of English travellers (with their musical inferiority complex and anxiety to show that England was no longer a land without music) and visiting foreigners (aware of these complexes and often polite, at least in public). What is significant is that the only English orchestras and choirs held up as comparable with those in Paris and Vienna were those run by Costa. In 1840, the *Morning Post* wrote that the Académie orchestra under Habeneck was infinitely beyond any of the English theatres 'except, of course, the Italian Opera house band which, under Costa's baton, I still consider on the whole unrivalled'.⁹⁸ After a continental tour in 1846, John Ella ranked Covent Garden third after Paris and Vienna (but ahead of Berlin, Munich and Leipzig).⁹⁹ Following the 1848 revolutions, standards fell at the theatre orchestras of Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Munich and Frankfurt and, according to Chorley, foreigners began to speak of Covent Garden's 'superior brilliancy, its amazing readiness in reading at sight, and its entire subjugation to its conductor'.¹⁰⁰ In 1848, the *ILN* critic contrasted the Covent Garden orchestra in *La donna del lago* ('unprecedented') with that of the *Opéra Italien* ('indeed terrible').¹⁰¹ The *Morning Post* judged that the Vienna Opera orchestra was unequalled

⁹⁶ *Shaw's Music*, vol. 2, 164; also 148.

⁹⁷ *Daily News* (29 Aug. 1849).

⁹⁸ *Morning Post* (20 May 1840).

⁹⁹ *Athenaeum* (21 Feb. 1846), 130.

¹⁰⁰ Chorley, *Musical Recollections*, 333.

¹⁰¹ *ILN* (29 April 1848), 280.

except for that of Covent Garden.¹⁰² These are selective and partial witnesses, but they show at least that Costa's orchestras generated a pride which would previously have been unimaginable.

Comparison of the orchestra's profile under Costa and others. The idea that the quality of the orchestra could be a major asset to the opera house took some time to be accepted by audiences which traditionally focused on the star singers. In 1841, Chorley put forward the novel idea that 'first should come the chorus and orchestra; then the singers in combination; then the stage arrangements; lastly the singers individually considered'.¹⁰³ He and Lumley saw the Covent Garden orchestra and chorus as the mainstay of the house.¹⁰⁴ There are frequent comments from the 1840s that Costa's orchestra was the best part of the evening, often redeeming mediocre performances.¹⁰⁵ Acute amateurs like George Eliot began to single out the virtues of the orchestra: 'I went to hear the *Huguenots* on Saturday evening. It was a rich treat, Mario, Grisi and Formes and that finest of orchestras under Costa'.¹⁰⁶

Comparison of Costa's profile with that of other conductors. Costa personified the change in the conductor's status from the early years of the century, when 'the poor conductor...was a mere harmless and necessary figure in a scheme of attractions in which his drawing capacity was not reckoned'.¹⁰⁷ From the late 1830s, Costa received

¹⁰² *Morning Post* (10 Feb. 1873).

¹⁰³ Chorley, *Music and Manners*, vol. 1, 289.

¹⁰⁴ Chorley, *Musical Recollections*, 333. Lumley, *Reminiscences*, ix.

¹⁰⁵ eg *Masaniello*, *Times* (27 July 1849).

¹⁰⁶ Eliot-Charles Bray (5 May 1852), Haight, *Letters*, vol. 2, 25.

¹⁰⁷ Kuhe, *Musical Recollections*, 278.

much of the credit for the rising standards at the King's Theatre¹⁰⁸; and from 1842, he was frequently called to the curtain with the lead singers.¹⁰⁹ 'Never was such a fuss made about a conductor...applauded when he comes on, applauded when he goes off'.¹¹⁰ Gye recorded that, when the 1853 season opened with a mediocre production of *Masaniello*, 'the greatest applause of the evening fell to the share of Signor Costa'.¹¹¹ As Costa became a box office draw, there were complaints when others stood in for him: *Punch* objected that 'We dedicated our guinea to Costa and Lo a Lucas stood in his place'.¹¹² In 1851, the Covent Garden proprietors considered Costa more valuable than a leading singer such as Mario.¹¹³ The impresario Henry Jarrett wrote that Costa would boost the subscription even without any star singer: 'I don't know of any such person or 'star' except Patti or Nilsson'.¹¹⁴ Costa's unique status was evident in the difficulty that the Italian Opera and the Philharmonic experienced in finding suitable replacements for him.

Costa as a benchmark for other conductors. The long period of pre-eminence that Costa enjoyed meant that he was frequently used as a benchmark for others. The *Morning Post* wrote that Jullien played Beethoven 'with a precision and a readiness which would

108 '...we have seldom heard a better ensemble obtained from the chorus and the orchestra. Signor Costa is entitled to especial praise for this'. *Times* (29 May 1839). 'The artistic zeal and intelligence of the Musical Director have ensured the continuance of those magnificent performances which have deservedly won for the Royal Opera House its great fame'. *ILN* (4 Sept. 1852), 190.

109 Costa received 'loud cheering and applause from the whole house.' *Times* (10 March 1848). '...a call from every part of the house for Mr Costa'. *Times* (22 April 1850). Costa was called with Grisi and Alboni at the end of the 1848 season. *Times* (25 Aug 1848). Curtain calls after *La donna del lago* 'in recognition of the skill, spirit and zeal of Signor Costa'. *Athenaeum* (21 Aug. 1847), 868.

110 *MW* (3 April 1847), 213.

111 Gye, 9 April 1853.

112 *Times* (13 May 1851) and *MW* (30 April 1852), 268.

113 Gye, *Travel Diary*, 27 Jan. 1851, cited by Dideriksen, 213.

114 Jarrett-Davison (18 Feb. 1871), Davison Collection, BL, 87.

not have disgraced Costa or Habeneck'.¹¹⁵ Other English conductors were compared unfavourably: Benedict was 'as bad a conductor as Costa was a good one'.¹¹⁶ The composer George Onslow said that he would rather entrust his works to Costa than to conduct them himself: 'His power over a band has no parallel within my recollection'.¹¹⁷ Shaw commented that 'The [Bayreuth] orchestra, conducted by Felix Mottl, played with an absolute precision which reminded me of Costa'.¹¹⁸ Critics frequently praised other conductors 'the Costa of Vienna' (Johan Franz Herbek), 'the American Costa' (Theodore Thomas) etc.¹¹⁹

Despite the caveats that must attach to these comparisons, they reinforce the common verdict that the three main musical bodies in Victorian London – the Opera, the Philharmonic and the SHS – achieved and maintained a higher level of discipline and efficiency under Costa's control. Even unsympathetic writers, like Davison and Grove, recognised that his regime had produced palpable improvement.

The rise in English orchestral standards in the middle decades of the century was not, of course, solely due to Costa. It reflected improvements across the music industry: better teaching, more facilities, a rising level of musical criticism; and higher standards in the larger provincial cities. But in the absence of any rival conductor of real status until Halle and Manns began to make their mark in the late 1850s, the new level of musical performance was rightly associated with Costa. Later in his career, even Victorian critics began to tire of repeating the same formulaic praises of Costa and his orchestras.

¹¹⁵ *Morning Post* (16 Jan. 1846).

¹¹⁶ Klein, *The Golden Age of Opera*, (London: G. Routledge & Sons, 1933), 120.

¹¹⁷ *ILN* (16 May 1846), 322.

¹¹⁸ *Shaw's Music*, vol. 1, 726.

¹¹⁹ Ella, *Musical Sketches*, 266.

In the next generation, different yardsticks were advanced – for creative interpretation, for progressive programming and later for ‘authenticity’. These were standards by which, as will be discussed in Chapters 9 and 10, Costa and his generation were found lacking.

Chapter 6: Her Majesty's Theatre: 1829-58

Chapter 2 described Costa's first five years at the King's Theatre (Her Majesty's Theatre after Queen Victoria's accession in 1837). This chapter deals with his role in the theatre's renaissance under Laporte and Lumley up to 1846 and in the 11 years of ferocious competition between Her Majesty's and the rival Italian Opera that Costa and others set up at Covent Garden in 1847.



Fig. 6.1 Costa in 1835.

Costa was first and foremost an opera conductor. He played a leading role in the opera throughout his career in England, apart from 1846 (when the Covent Garden company had not yet been formed) and 1869-70 (when he had left Covent Garden and not yet joined Mapleson). It was there that he laid down the template of reform in musical management, which he later applied to the Philharmonic and the oratorio circuit.

6.1 The Music Market

Costa's career was played out against several themes that were reshaping the opera world in London. First, the tension between the exigencies of the business model, which demanded that the manager remained at least ostensibly solvent, and the taste of the period, which demanded larger orchestras, more elaborate spectacle and higher standards of performance. Second, the changing balance between the soloists (who dominated the bel canto repertoire) and the orchestral and choral ensemble (which became more important as grand opera entered the repertoire in the 1840s). Third, the

conflicting ambitions of the director-manager, the conductor-manager and the other influential figures who were emerging as the music business became more specialised. And finally the interplay between the demand from one part of the audience for novelty and the wish of an important new section of the audience to hear familiar operas, which encouraged repeat performances and the creation of a canon of operatic works. As the leading conductor during this period, Costa was involved – positively or negatively – in all of these interfaces.

The commercial context is the key to understanding the evolution of the opera houses in the mid-nineteenth-century. The financial and administrative stresses of what Frederick Gye called ‘the dreadful business of opera management’ have been eloquently described by Gabriella Dideriksen and Matthew Ringel.¹ They included commercial pressures such as high rents, costly litigation, competition from unregulated smaller theatres and a bidding war for the few singers capable of performing the heavy new repertoire. Profitability was also affected by the accidents of epidemics, riots, royal mourning and economic slumps.² It is questionable whether the opera was as fundamentally insolvent as managers claimed and as the long roll-call of fleeing bankrupts suggests.³ But by the late 1820s, when the term ‘entrepreneur’ first entered the language, a new breed of manager was trying to run the opera on a more commercial basis. Their preoccupation was less artistic than legal (to wrest an uncluttered lease from a morass of conflicting

1 Matthew Ringel, ‘Opera in the Donizettian Dark Ages: Management, Competition and Artistic Policy in London 1861-70’ (Ph. D. diss., University of London, 1996) (hereafter ‘Ringel’) and Ringel and Dideriksen.

2 On Chartism, Lumley, *Reminiscences*, 219; on cholera, Gye, 4 Aug. 1849; on financial crises, Cairns, *Berlioz*, vol. 2, 309.

3 The list of bankrupts in the period 1800-50, includes Edmund Waters, Owen Swiney, John Cross, Francesco Vaneschi, Persiani, Delafield, Laporte, and Monck Mason. Lumley, Gye and Mapleson all came near to bankruptcy in 1850-70. For evidence of creative accounting, with income by-passing Gye’s account with Coutt’s, see Dideriksen, 85, note 93.

claims) and economic (to expand ticket sales and to squeeze the costs associated with grand opera).⁴

The management of opera was also deeply affected as the music world underwent the specialisation that was affecting every area of Britain's *laissez-faire* economy.⁵ This showed itself in radical changes in musical training, programming, publishing, journalism, marketing and stage management. The privileges of Her Majesty's, Drury Lane and Covent Garden were increasingly challenged by competitors. In 1824, seven theatres pre-empted Drury Lane's production (itself a pastiche) of Weber's *Der Freischütz*. By 1843, the theatres were largely deregulated and smaller theatres were free to compete with the traditional opera houses.

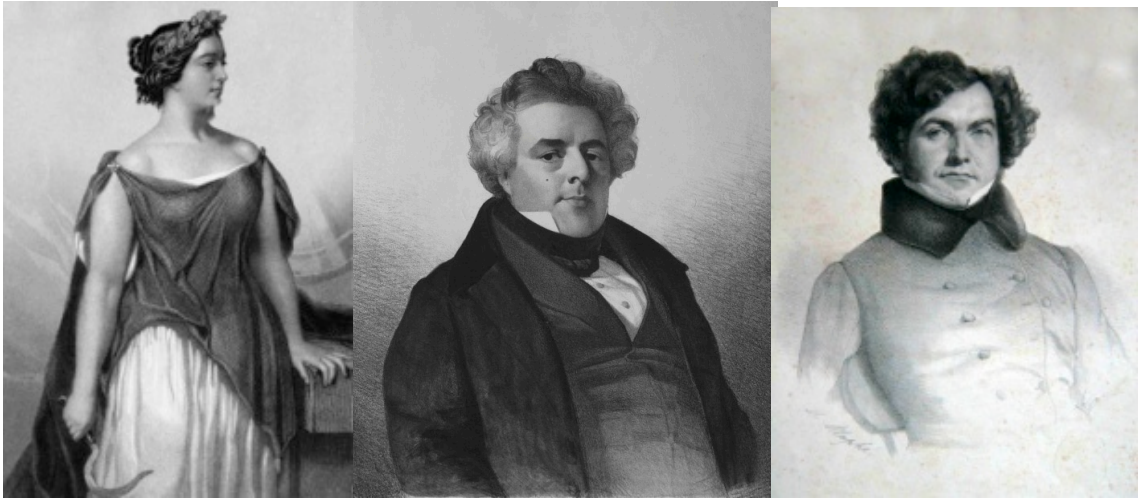
The high costs and uncertain revenue of the opera business guaranteed a fraught relationship between managers (who enjoyed no subsidies) and Music Directors (who had to turn out respectable productions with limited resources and minimum rehearsal). Music Directors were usually short-term and expendable. Costa's case is unusual in that he was Musical Director for 47 years – longer than anyone before or since – and dealt with managers who were themselves remarkably long-lived: Laporte ran his theatre for 13 years, Lumley for 17, Gye for 30 and Mapleson for 20. Costa's longevity and personality ensured that he played a central role in the four main phases of opera in the mid-nineteenth-century: the golden age of Her Majesty's (1835-46), the bitter war that followed the creation of the Royal Italian Opera at Covent Garden (1846-52), the

4 On the efforts of managers to appeal to a wider paying public by adjusting programmes and curtain times and offering discounted tickets, see Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts*, 147-84.

5 On the structural changes see especially Katharine Ellis, 'The Structure of Musical Life', ed. Jim Samson, *Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 343-7; Roger Parker, 'The Opera Industry', *ibid.*, 87-118 and David Carew, 'The Consumption of Music', *ibid.*, 237-59; Christina Bashford, *The Pursuit of High Culture*; William Weber, *Music and the middle class: The social structure of concert life in London, Paris and Vienna between 1830 and 1848* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Simon McVeigh, 'Benefit Concerts in 19th-Century London: From "tax on the nobility" to "monstrous nuisance"', *Nineteenth-Century British Musical Studies*.

latter's period of dominance until Costa's resignation (1852-69) and the final struggle between Covent Garden and Mapleson's company (1871-80).

6.2 Laporte (1829-41)



Figs 6.2/4 Three of the Old Guard who dominated the King's Theatre during Laporte's management: Giulia Grisi, Luigi Lablache and Giovanni Rubini.



Figs 6.5/7 The other main members of the Old Guard: Fanny Persiani, Antonio Tamburini and Giovanni Mario.

After his fraught early years (Chapter 2.3), Laporte enjoyed six years of success, with an outstanding cast and ballet, a reformed orchestra and a repertoire of long-running bel canto hits. Chorley wrote that the house had changed 'from a pillory...to a paradise of

dainty devices'.⁶ But the opera was dominated by a cabal of Italian musicians, known as 'The Old Guard': Giulia Grisi, Fanny Persiani, Giovanni Rubini, Luigi Lablache, Luigi Tamburini and Costa, joined in 1839 by the tenor Giovanni Mario (Figs 6.2/7). They resented Laporte's mismanagement, his preference for the ballet and his attempt to wrest control of the claue from the singers.⁷ Their demand for a decisive say in the casting led to a management crisis. The *Musical World* wrote of the 1836 season that, 'owing to bad management or the caprices of singers, there was scarcely a performance without a vast degree of chopping and changing'.⁸

Ella, the lead second violin, confirmed the bad effect on the theatre of the bickering between the soloists and management: when the tenor Ivanoff refused to stand in for Rubini, 'the damp thrown upon the expected spirited performance by this disappointment and row was throughout the evening much felt by the singers and band'.⁹ In 1840, Laporte tried belatedly to assert his authority by dropping Tamburini. The Old Guard conspired with Lord Castlereagh (Grisi's admirer) to prevent performances by engineering the 'Tamburini Riots'. Laporte, whose 'strength was failing him in mind as well as body', climbed down and retreated to France, where he died of heart disease.¹⁰

Amid these squabbles Costa struggled to manage the fractious musicians and ensure three performances a week while Laporte dealt with his legal/financial preoccupations. This situation enabled Costa to accumulate more power than any of his predecessors

⁶ *Athenaeum* (15 April 1837), 268.

⁷ On the ballet, Lumley, *Reminiscences*, 113. On the claue, Gruneisen, *Opera and the Press* (London: 1869), 65-6; and *MW* (13 Jan. 1837), 63.

⁸ *MW* (26 Aug. 1836), 175.

⁹ Ella Diary, 23 April 1836.

¹⁰ Lumley, *Reminiscences*, 18.

(Chapter 4 and Appendix A). But his ambivalent position between the Old Guard and Lumley proved unmanageable under Laporte's successor.

6.3 Lumley (1841-46)

Benjamin Lumley (Fig. 6.8) inherited all of Laporte's management problems but was confident that his superior business skills would enable him to avoid Laporte's humiliations. A solicitor from a Canadian-Jewish family, he was energetic, resilient and capable of great charm. But his *Reminiscences*, probably ghosted, reveal a devious and vain man with a strong streak of self-delusion.¹¹

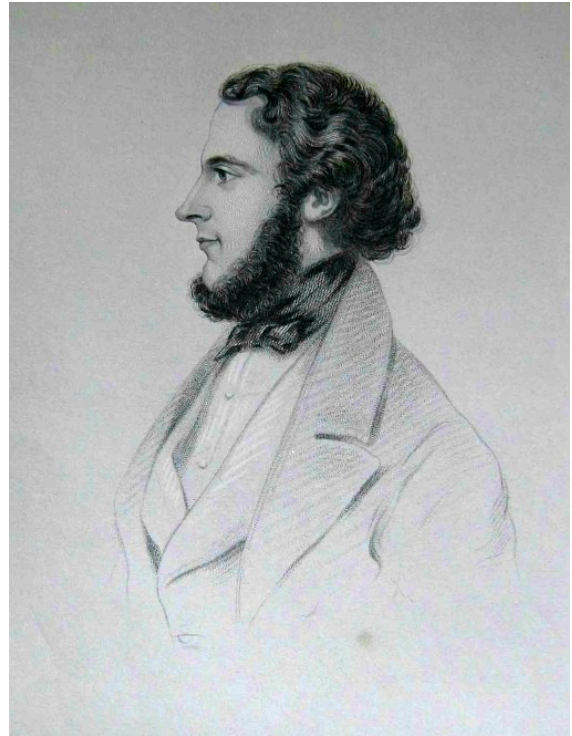


Fig. 6.8 Benjamin Lumley (1811-75).

His fatal weaknesses were financial

recklessness and poor man-management, which led him to alienate the key musicians and lease-holders on whom his venture critically depended.

Lumley began with powerful assets: a winning cast and orchestra as well as the finest ballet troupe of the century. Her Majesty's had a core repertoire of bel canto successes; Bellini and Donizetti provided eight of the fourteen operas in 1841. This suited the Old Guard who disliked novelty and preferred to sing the operas they had performed earlier in the year in Paris. But one of Lumley's attractive traits was his readiness to take risks by staging new operas. His production of *Ernani* in 1845, before it had appeared in Paris, was the first of five Verdi premieres at Her Majesty's in the 1840s.

¹¹ They may have been ghosted by Harriet Grote, the dedicatee. Jennifer Hall-Witt 'The Refashioning of Fashionable Society: Opera-going and Sociability in Britain 1821-61' (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1996), 427-31.

Lumley's experience as Laporte's right-hand man left him with 'one fixed rule – that a manager must be the sole master in his own theatre'.¹² In 1845, he purchased the lease on Her Majesty's. He assiduously cultivated the elite subscribers, who remained loyal while the gallery staged the 'Persiani Riot' (when Fanny Persiani was dropped in 1841). Most of the critics, won over by a mix of flattery and free passes, supported him against what he justly described as 'the caprices, the cabals and the ill-humours of the artists'. He was lucky that many of the back-stage squabbles were between the singers rather than directed against himself. But by 1842, there was 'an essential revolution' in the company.¹³ Mario (by now Grisi's lover) refused to sing the sexually-charged role of Pollione in *Norma* opposite Moltini. 'Every night seems of late to have been marked by a new singer, a new quarrel or a new disappointment'.¹⁴

In 1841, Lumley began to clip the wings of the Old Guard. After Persiani was dropped, her husband Giuseppe's opera *Il Fantasma* was cancelled. There was little public protest when Tamburini was replaced, though he clearly 'wanted to be rioted for'.¹⁵ In 1843-4, with Grisi having a baby, Lumley decided not to renew Mario's contract. Most of the critics supported Lumley and praised his productions. 'Altogether there has never been such an opera season in this or any other country'. The production of *I Puritani* was 'never equalled...by any convocation of talent that Europe has yet heard or seen'.¹⁶

One element of Lumley's quest to establish managerial control was an attempt to take back from Costa the management of the musicians' contracts. But he abandoned this

¹² Cox, *Musical Recollections*, vol. 2, 130.

¹³ *Times* (15 Aug. 1842).

¹⁴ *Athenaeum* (7 May 1842), 411.

¹⁵ *Athenaeum* (27 March 1841), 245.

¹⁶ Unidentified reviews of 16 and 18 May 1843 at London Theatre Museum.

when opposed by the players
and criticised by the
Athenaeum.¹⁷ Preoccupied with
his legal/financial battles,
Lumley, depended on Costa to
keep the opera on the road: to
change the programme at short
notice when singers announced
themselves 'indisposed' or the
orchestra refused (as in 1842) to
go into the pit unless assured of
payment. Costa remained
Lumley's link to Queen Victoria,
who made her first State Visit in
1843. They initially found a way
of working together. Costa had

benefit performances in 1843 and 1844, the latter for his opera *Don Carlos* (Fig. 6.9).
Lumley's prospectus for the 1844 season stated: 'Director of the music, composer and
conductor, Signor Costa, as usual, and as we trust he will long continue to be.' He
confirmed Costa's extensive powers and a salary of £800 in a contract of 1845
(Appendix A).

Circumstances were developing to Costa's advantage. He was respected by the singers,
who recognised that he was the gate-keeper for royal concerts (Chapter 8). He was
enjoying some success as a composer (Chapter 9). Most importantly, he was seen as a

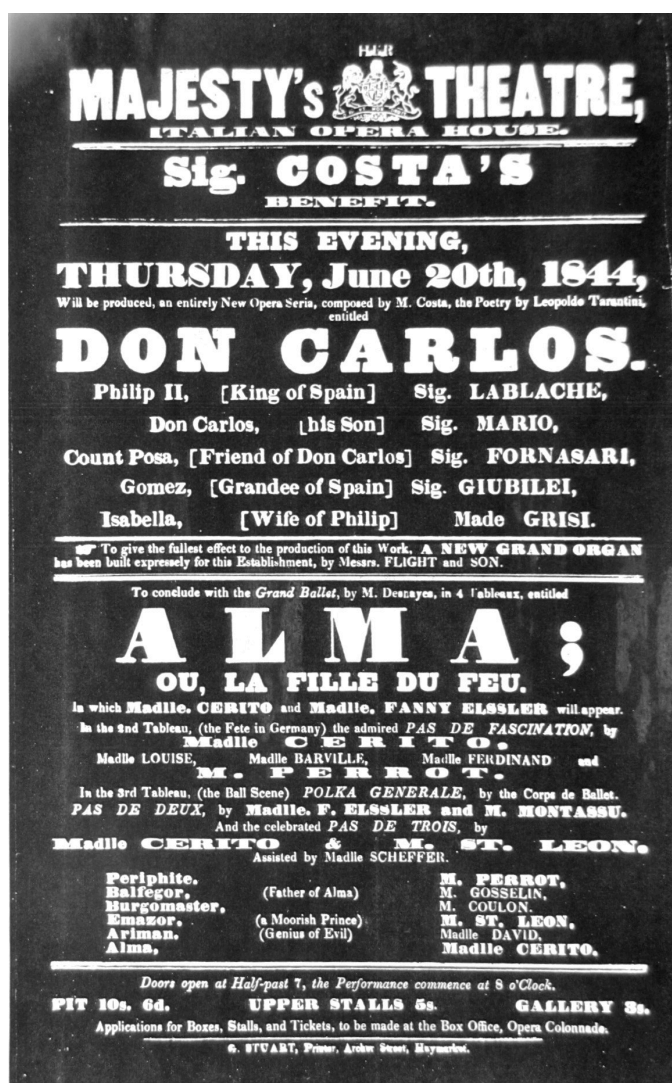


Fig. 6.9 Costa's 1844 benefit: his second London opera, *Don Carlos*, and his ballet *Alma*.

¹⁷ *Athenaeum* (7 May 1842), 411.

new phenomenon: a professional conductor with a system of centralised control and contractual powers to enforce it. There was a growing realisation among critics that Costa's musicians and his conducting were an important ingredient in the success of the opera. In Donizetti's *Belisario*, 'The... "getting up" does great credit to the conducting influence of Mr Costa, who fills his post with more credit to himself than any of his predecessors'.¹⁸ The orchestra was at times seen as redeeming poor productions. In Hérold's *Zampa* in March 1844, 'had Signor Costa's admirable band played the work through without the singing, the public would have been content'.¹⁹

It was at this stage that Lumley made the fatal mistake of alienating Costa by invoking his contract to prevent him from conducting the Philharmonic for the 1845 season.

Costa 'entreated' Lumley to allow him to accept the Philharmonic post, which carried special prestige, but he was refused 'on a plea of priority of engagements'.²⁰ There was clearly a rapid worsening of their relations during 1845, when Costa's contract obliged him to continue at Her Majesty's. Costa was one of only two artists who did not subscribe to a testimonial to Lumley at the end of the season.²¹ There was no contact between them until Lumley returned from Paris in December to discover that Costa, now free from his contract, had signed up with the Philharmonic for 1846.

There was a widespread feeling that the real reason for the split had not emerged in their exchange of correspondence (Appendix A).²² The *Musical World* was probably correct when it commented that 'the jealous lessee of Her Majesty's Theatre, proud of his

¹⁸ Unidentified review of 25 March 1843 at London Theatre Museum.

¹⁹ *Athenaeum* (23 March 1844), 275.

²⁰ Costa-Watts (31 Jan. 1845), BL RPS, MSS 339/212.

²¹ Lumley, *Reminiscences*, 129.

²² *ILN* (7 Feb. 1846), 98.

managerial prerogative, did not like, and could not brook' Costa's extensive powers.²³

The two men, both autocratic by temperament, had drawn incompatible lessons from their careers: Lumley was determined to rule his house, while Costa wanted the power to prevent the musical anarchy that had blighted his first years there.

Lumley's victories over the Old Guard proved to be pyrrhic. The Persianis plotted with others to set up a new Italian Opera at Covent Garden. Costa, a key element in these plans, agreed to become Musical Director of Covent Garden provided Grisi and Mario joined him when their contracts expired at the end of 1846.²⁴ Conducting the Philharmonic gave Costa continued contact with most of the Opera musicians and, on the last day of the 1846 season, he signed up 53 of the players and 45 choristers for Covent Garden.²⁵

Lumley's failure to pre-empt this chain of events was his biggest professional mistake. A more skilled manipulator like Frederick Gye would have avoided this danger by compromising with Costa over the Philharmonic and binding the artistes to him with flattery, concessions and presents. But Lumley, who boasted the title '*L'Homme Mystérieux*', lacked Gye's flexibility and manipulative skills. By failing to prevent a mass exodus by the Old Guard, he fostered the very rival company he wished to avoid.

6.4 Competition (1846-58)

The rivalry between Her Majesty's and Covent Garden, which George Hogarth compared to the schism between Handel's company and Porpora's Opera of the Nobility in 1733, has been described in various sources.²⁶ The following sections consider an

²³ *MW* (12 Feb. 1848), 99.

²⁴ Lumley, *Reminiscences*, 157. Gruneisen, *The Opera and the Press*, 6

²⁵ Gruneisen, *The Opera and the Press*, 6 and *Morning Chronicle* (21 Aug. 1846 and 5 Jan. 1847).

²⁶ Rosenthal, *Two Centuries of Opera at Covent Garden* (London: Putnam, 1958), 72-123. Chorley, *Musical Recollections*, 73-381.

aspect that has been less analysed: the extent to which the outcome hinged on the importance of ensemble in opera and the critical role in this of the conductor and orchestra. The battle fell into five phases:

- a phoney war in 1846, when Her Majesty's still enjoyed a monopoly;
- the initial campaign of 1847-49, which ended with the bankruptcy of the Covent Garden leaseholders;
- the 'Commonwealth' experiment of 1850 and Gye's assumption of the Covent Garden lease in 1851, leading to Lumley's closure in 1852;
- Covent Garden's virtual monopoly in 1853-6 until the Fire there allowed Lumley to re-enter the lists;
- two years of attrition, ending with Lumley's final collapse in 1858.

For Costa, this period was one of the most stressful of his career. In addition to creating a new opera company from scratch in highly fraught circumstances, he was taking over and reforming the Philharmonic (1846) and the Sacred Harmonic Society (1848). Since he was at first 'the life and soul of the opposing establishment', he was the main target of Lumley's strategy to destroy the rival venture before it could open.²⁷

6.4.1 The Phoney War: 1846

Lumley tried to discredit Costa through a personalised attack in the press, to which Costa responded vigorously but with dignity (Appendix A). Lumley's supporters also spread rumours that the Covent Garden scheme had collapsed, the building was physically unsafe and the Persianis had withdrawn.²⁸ Lumley tried unsuccessfully to

²⁷ *MW* (10 April 1847), 229.

²⁸ *MW* (15 Aug. 1846), 391 and (23 Jan. 1847), 58.

persuade the Lord Chamberlain that Covent Garden's patent did not permit opera in Italian and that competition would ruin the business of both houses, as it had done 'in the annihilation of the British Drama'.²⁹

In this battle, which Lumley called 'a struggle for life or death' and Chorley entitled 'the cauldron of scandal' between 'London's Montagu and Capulet opera houses', the press for the first time played a crucial part.³⁰ The propaganda war between the two houses became a weekly soap opera that fascinated not only the expanding music journals but also the daily press.

Among the new breed of music-journalist, the 'undisputed captain of the host' was J.W. Davison, editor of the *Musical World* and critic of the *Times*.³¹ Davison professed to strike a neutral note between the two houses. 'We court neither, prefer neither and fear neither'.³² But, with his preference for home-grown musicians, he favoured Balfe/Lumley over Costa/Persiani. He denounced the 'incursion of foreign speculators' and claimed to be worried about 'the thin spectres of operas from the Signors Costa and Persiani'.³³ A private letter shows that he saw Lumley as the likely victor:

Now, seriously, would you or I...give two pence to hear one of Verdi's operas, even supported by the fine singers, efficient chorus and magnificent orchestra which Costa has so cleverly inveigled from his late master, Mr Lumley?...The taste of John Bull tends decidedly towards the ballet, and therein lies the irresistible strength of Mr Lumley...³⁴

29 Lumley-Lord Chamberlain (27 Aug. 1846), Entry Book of In-Letters, LC1/27 (1845-7), 2539, PRO. Cited by Dideriksen.

30 Lumley, *Reminiscences*, 153; Chorley's phrase in *Musical Recollections*, 204.

31 Joseph Bennet, *Forty Years*, 21.

32 *MW* (30 Jan. 1847), 61.

33 *MW* (19 Sept. 1846), 442 and 475-6.

34 Davison-Desmond Ryan, *MW* (26 Sept. 1846), 257-8.

On the other side were what Lumley called ‘the Covent-Gardenite sharp-shooters of the pen’. Gruneisen of the *Morning Chronicle* was their polemicist but Henry Chorley was especially dangerous because he used the prestige of the *Athenaeum* to ridicule Lumley’s press spin, hired claque and hyperbolic prospectus, which promised productions of Mendelssohn’s *The Tempest* and Verdi’s *King Lear*, neither of which existed.³⁵ Chorley had slowly overcome his doubts about Costa and believed that Lumley had made a fatal mistake in parting with him.³⁶

Both theatres strove to exploit the growing influence of the press by cultivating the critics and spinning their prospectuses. Lumley was probably the worse offender, having bound most of the critics to Her Majesty’s by free passes and perhaps other inducements (Chapter 1). Chorley later claimed that Lumley’s press supporters, ‘who play in any key the manager pleases’, were a major cause of the downfall of Her Majesty’s Theatre, ‘day by day described as unparagoned in the splendour of its performances’.³⁷

Gruneisen, himself an inveterate puffer, agreed: ‘Mr Lumley relied on the press and was ruined by the press.’ But Covent Garden too cultivated the press energetically.

Overall Lumley had the better of the phoney war of 1846. With the Old Guard and the orchestra still under contract to him, he made the most of his last monopoly season. He put on an ambitious programme of 21 operas and 13 ballets, including the British premiere of Verdi’s *Nino* [*Nabucco*]. Even allowing for creative advertising and a pliable press, it was an impressive season. The *ILN* said that the season was one of ‘unmixed satisfaction’, with a repertoire and performances of a higher quality than in

³⁵ *Morning Chronicle* (12 April 1847).

³⁶ *Athenaeum* (2 May 1846), 459.

³⁷ Chorley, *Musical Recollections*, 176.

previous years.³⁸ Davison pronounced Her Majesty's 'the first theatre in Europe'. By contrast, the Covent Garden project was still 'a mere matter of conjecture'.³⁹ Summing up a near-consensus in the press, he concluded that Covent Garden lacked location, tradition, prestige, ballet, aristocratic support and legal authority.⁴⁰

Lumley claimed that 1846 was 'eminently successful in a financial as well as an artistic point of view'. But he foresaw that the 'disastrous secession...headed by Signor Costa' heralded a phase of intense competition.⁴¹ He confessed to Charles Dickens that he was 'hugely afeared of the opposition at Covent Garden', though professing to be relieved at having got rid of Grisi and Mario.⁴²

6.4.2 The First Campaign: 1847-49

In the direct competition that began in 1847, both Italian Opera companies operated on a fragile financial base, which sharpened the battle to attract subscribers. To raise £105,000 for his lease, Lumley had been forced to sell 41 property boxes and to assign a further 40, thus forfeiting 30-40% of his box revenue.⁴³ Covent Garden's finances were even more stretched by heavy expenses on new scenery and costumes; the latter were valued in 1856 at £30,000.⁴⁴ The lease cost £36,000 and the redesign of the rebuilding was variously estimated between £40,000 and £70,000. Not surprisingly, the initial lease-holders – the part-time composer Giuseppe Persiani (1847) and the brewer

³⁸ *ILN* (22 Aug. 1846), 122.

³⁹ *Times* (19 Aug. 1846 and 6 Feb. 1846).

⁴⁰ *MW* (19 Sept. 1846), 441-2.

⁴¹ Lumley, *Reminiscences*, 132.

⁴² Dickens-T.J. Thompson (2 Dec. 1846), ed. Kathleen Tillotson, *The Letters of Charles Dickens* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), vol. 4, 672.

⁴³ Contemporary note in the collection of the late Tony Gasson.

⁴⁴ Gye, 6 March 1856.

Edward Delafield (1848-9) – went bankrupt. The deficit for 1848 and 1849 totalled £59,412.⁴⁵ When Frederick Gye, after much hesitation, agreed to become the manager, he wrote prophetically in his Diary ‘I could see nothing but immense trouble and no pay.’⁴⁶

The strengths of the two companies differed markedly. Lumley occupied London’s established opera house, with a prestigious clientele, and had most of the press on his side. He possessed a stronger ballet troupe, the leading bass in Lablache, the soprano Jenny Lind and from 1849 the contralto Marietta Alboni (Fig. 6.10). Covent Garden had two major advantages: Costa and his musicians; and the Old Guard stars, who were joined by the soprano Jeanne Castellan and the contralto Pauline Viardot.

Each house claimed a distinct clientele, repertory and even aesthetic. The Tories were thought to patronise Her Majesty’s while Covent Garden, with slightly lower prices, drew a higher proportion of Liberals and lesser aristocracy. This led some to posit ‘a dualised paradigm’ that identified Her Majesty’s with the traditional notion of opera as a social



Fig. 6.10 Lumley’s stars: Marietta Alboni and Jenny Lind.

event, offering contemporary Italian works with an emphasis on bel canto singing.

Covent Garden by contrast was associated with a more serious audience – dressed in

⁴⁵ Details of Delafield’s bankruptcy proceedings are in the *Times* (7 Sept. 1849). A good analysis of Covent Garden’s finances for 1847-58 is in Dideriksen, 82-106.

⁴⁶ Gye, 19 July 1847.

black tie and evening dress rather than the ‘double-folded white cravats that were *de rigueur* at Her Majesty’s – listening in respectful silence to art-works by ‘the great Masters’.⁴⁷

Jennifer Hall-Witt observes that these pictures were ‘useful rhetorical devices’ for the critics to advance their own *werktreue* agenda by contrasting the habits and tastes of the aristocracy (social, vocal, Italian) and those of sober middle class citizens like themselves (musical, instrumental, German).⁴⁸ But practice did not bear out this caricature of cultural politics. Having promised to offer the best operas ‘without distinction of country’ as a progressive alternative to ‘the wishy-washy Italian masters’, Covent Garden in 1847 provided only Italian operas, 80% of them by Rossini (7), Bellini (2) and Donizetti (5). In a pattern that became common, it also copied two of Lumley’s new Verdi productions. In 1847-52, contrary to its manifesto, Covent Garden gave more weight to Italian (51%) and grand opera (33%) than to the Austro-German school (13%).⁴⁹ Her Majesty’s proved to be the more innovative, with the world premiere of Verdi’s *I masnadieri* and early performances of other Verdi operas, as well as Meyerbeer’s *Robert le diable* and Donizetti’s *La favorita* and *La fille du regiment*.

Insofar as there was a cultural difference between the two houses, it was to be found not in the repertoire but in how it was performed. Lumley relied on the drawing power of Jenny Lind, who dominated the seasons of 1847 and 1848, with brilliant performances in *La fille du regiment* (Maria), *L’Elisir d’amore* (Adina) and *Robert le Diable* (Alice). Lind saved Lumley financially but at a heavy artistic cost. The ‘pernicious star system’

⁴⁷ Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts*, 182-4 and 232-47. Edmund Yates, *Recollections and Experiences*, 180.

⁴⁸ Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts*, 10

⁴⁹ Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts*, 298.

was ‘utterly destructive of every other artist in the company’.⁵⁰ Lind’s success ‘robbed everything else of its attraction and even the incomparable Lablache...failed to draw anyone to the opera’.⁵¹ Covent Garden’s strength in depth enabled it to juggle programmes and to convince Meyerbeer to entrust his operas to Costa and his musicians. At the end of the 1848 season, Davison wrote that Covent Garden had survived the epidemic of Lindmania by relying on ‘the excellence of the ensemble, rather than the preponderating influence of any one particular star...’⁵²

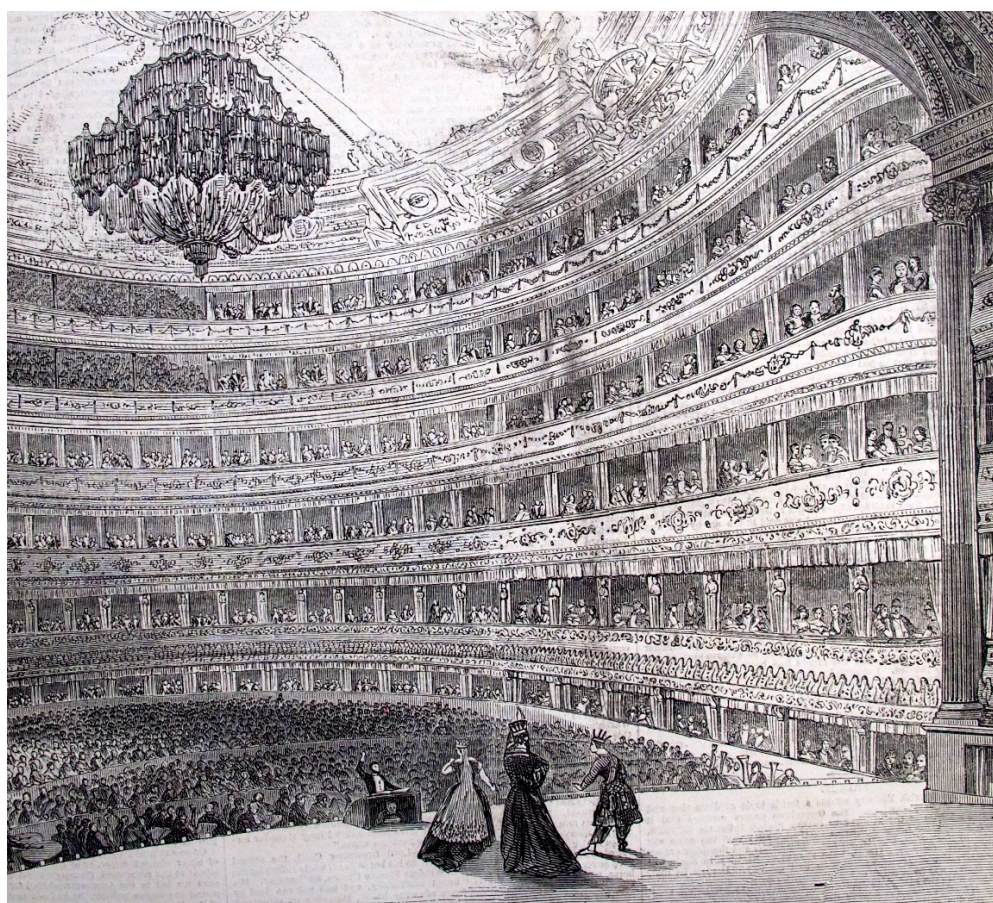


Fig. 6.11 Opening of Covent Garden with *Semiramide* (*ILN*, 10 April 1847, 225).

Lumley stole a march on Covent Garden by opening two months earlier with a much-praised production of *La favorita*.⁵³ Covent Garden opened with an acclaimed

⁵⁰ *ILN* (21 Aug. 1852), 134 and *Athenaeum* (28 Aug. 1847), 917.

⁵¹ *MW* (4 Sept. 1847), 565.

⁵² *Times* (24 Aug. 1848).

⁵³ *Times* (17 Feb. 1847).

Semiramide (Fig. 6.11), followed by a stream of successes – *I Puritani*, *Le nozze di Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*. The *Musical World* commented towards the end of the season that it could ‘record nothing save triumph after triumph...’⁵⁴ The duplication of productions permitted some telling comparisons. The *Musical World* conceded that Covent Garden’s *Le nozze di Figaro* was ‘perhaps the most perfect ever accomplished in this country’, whereas the production at Her Majesty’s was ‘inferior both in completeness and in individual excellence to the cast’.⁵⁵ Her Majesty’s *Il due Foscari*, was described by Chorley as ‘most unequal...the chorus rough and incorrect...the orchestra went along in slipshod independence of the singers’.⁵⁶ Covent Garden’s version a month later featured Grisi, Mario, Ronconi and Tagliafico and was ‘the most complete success’ thanks to Costa’s ‘exceeding care’.⁵⁷ Hogarth found Costa’s delicate conducting almost enough to make Verdi’s operas bearable.⁵⁸

It is difficult to assess the two companies on the basis of the often partisan reviews. Chorley and Gruneisen predictably magnified every defect of the Lumley regime and downplayed his undoubted successes.⁵⁹ The *Times* treated Lumley’s weak supporting singers kindly. The tenor Suparchi was perhaps a little flat; Fagani ‘will, if we mistake not, make great improvements on her performance on Saturday’.⁶⁰

The evidence is easier to decipher in respect of the conductors, orchestras and choruses. On this the material is fuller than for previous decades, since it was an aspect of the

⁵⁴ *MW* (11 Sept. 1847), 383.

⁵⁵ *MW* (15 July 1848), 451 and (4 Aug. 1847), 518.

⁵⁶ *Athenaeum* (19 April 1847), 418.

⁵⁷ *MW* (26 June 1847), 411.

⁵⁸ *ILN* (26 June 1847), 413.

⁵⁹ *Athenaeum* (31 Jan. 1846), 128.

⁶⁰ For more similar reviews see *Times* (17 and 27 Feb. 1847, 27 March 1848 and 12 March 1850).

opera to which critics began to attach a new importance. After failing to attract Spohr or Meyerbeer, Lumley appointed Michael Balfe. Costa and Balfe managed to stay on congenial terms. Balfe insisted on checking with Costa before accepting Lumley's offer.⁶¹ Costa later completed Balfe's opera *Il Talismano* for performance after his death in 1874 and presided over the inauguration of a statue to him at Drury Lane. But in the febrile atmosphere of 1846-7, the battle between the two theatres focussed to a large extent on the two conductors.

While Gruneisen and Chorley attacked Balfe as 'a maestro who...has never shown cleverness in conducting any operas save his own', he was at first treated gently by the rest of the press.⁶² In 1846, when Costa's players were still contracted to Lumley, Davison commented that Balfe was showing 'a perfect command over the magnificent orchestra'. 'Perhaps no artist in the country, better qualified for the post by education, taste and ability, could have been selected than Mr Balfe.' Any detractors were anti-patriotic or '*coster-mongers*'. The *ILN* judged that he had filled Costa's place 'to the general satisfaction of the Opera votaries'.⁶³

But Davison was stretching the truth when he described Balfe as 'eminently qualified' as a conductor.⁶⁴ Although a successful composer of English operas, he had little conducting experience. From the start, he was widely criticised for stamping. Even Davison's *Musical World* requested him to 'prevail upon his foot and his baton to perform *piano*. On Saturday the two out-thumped the great drum.'⁶⁵ The effect was of

⁶¹ Charles Kenney, *A Memoir of Balfe* (London: 1875), 208.

⁶² *Athenaeum* (21 Aug. 1847), 893.

⁶³ *ILN* (22 Aug. 1846), 122.

⁶⁴ *MW* (23 Jan. 1847), 47.

⁶⁵ *Athenaeum* (31 March 1849), 339.

‘a country theatre band with an emphatic leader’.⁶⁶ Balfe also lacked Costa’s personal authority and sense of dignity. One cannot imagine Costa writing flippantly to a theatre manager offering to work like a slave for £30 a week (when Costa was receiving over £80 a week).⁶⁷

Lumley must have sensed that he was vulnerable in this area, as he tried again to entice Verdi back to London on a lucrative 10-year contract. Verdi, who had conducted two performances of *I Masnadieri* in 1847, made the significant proviso that he should be free to reshape the orchestra. But their negotiations came to nothing and Balfe stayed. Lumley tried to disguise the desertion of 98 musicians to Covent Garden by claiming in his 1847 prospectus that:

A numerous orchestra of the most distinguished talent and power has been selected from some of the best orchestras in Europe... The chorus has been chosen with the greatest care from Belgium, Germany and England and will comprise upwards of 80 performers.⁶⁸

The critics echoed this line. ‘The band, under Mr Balfe, has been numerically strengthened and is pronounced with the chorus to be far superior to that of previous seasons.’⁶⁹ The *ILN* described the orchestra as ‘exceedingly full and brilliant... we have lost nothing by the changes which have been effected’.⁷⁰ Davison congratulated Lumley on having ‘vanquished one of his chiefest difficulties... We are sure that neither Signor Costa nor the seceders... foresaw this inevitable result.’⁷¹ But two months later the *Musical World* reported that the wood and brass needed improvement, the strings

⁶⁶ *MW* (15 July 1848), 449.

⁶⁷ Balfe-Smith (6 March 1860), Bennett, *Forty Years*, 409.

⁶⁸ *Morning Chronicle* (5 Jan. 1847). Lumley, *Reminiscences*, 158.

⁶⁹ Unidentified review of 16 Feb 1847 at the London Theatre Museum.

⁷⁰ *ILN* (27 Feb. 1847), 121.

⁷¹ *MW* (23 Jan. 1847), 47.

strengthening and the 'kitchen furniture' subduing. 'We will give Balfe another season...to become as good as Mr Costa.'⁷²

When the Queen saw Lind in *Robert le Diable* in May, she commented that 'the choruses were bad and the orchestra very often went wrong'.⁷³ Visiting foreigners were strongly critical and even friendly critics voiced doubts about Balfe and his heterogeneous players.⁷⁴ Meyerbeer privately described a production of *I Lombardi* as 'a complete flop...a pitiful performance'.⁷⁵

At the end of the 1847 season, the *Musical World* summed up that an encouraging performance by the band and chorus in *La fille du regiment* had proved to be 'the song of the swan – every subsequent work produced presenting these necessary adjuncts of an operatic company in a more disadvantageous point of view'.⁷⁶ Lumley might as well have dismissed his chorus and retained a quarter of the players under the first violin, Nadaud. Davison conceded that 'Mr Lumley's troupe was...inferior to the troupe of the Royal Italian Opera'. But he implicitly blamed Costa:

it would be unfair to complain that Lumley cannot crack walnuts with his teeth when Costa has taken away the teeth he originally created for Lumley. Even Balfe...can do little or nothing, with all his talent and experience, of such a rickety set of teeth, half of which are decayed, and a fourth brittle...Mr Lumley must look to his teeth...otherwise he is likely to have tooth-ache.'⁷⁷

At first Davison believed that the Covent Gardenites were wrong to see their unrivalled band and chorus as their trump card. 'For that the public care very little...Mr Lumley

⁷² *MW* (13 March 1847), 173.

⁷³ RA QVJ 4 May 1847.

⁷⁴ Examples cited in Carse, *Beethoven to Berlioz*, 187.

⁷⁵ Meyerbeer (8 April 1847), Becker, *Giacomo Meyerbeer: Briefwechsel und Tagebücher* (Berlin: 1885), vol. 4, 230.

⁷⁶ *MW* (4 Sept. 1847), 566.

⁷⁷ *MW* (11 Sept. 1847), 585.

can get another band and another chorus, but he cannot find another Grisi and another Mario.⁷⁸ But he soon appreciated the importance of the conductor's domain in the era of grand opera. In a thoughtful review of the 1848 season, he drew attention to:

The growing importance of the orchestral and choral departments...Encores are now awarded to overtures, choruses and other concerted pieces, which formerly were listened to with indifference...The success of an opera now not infrequently depends on the efficiency of the orchestra and the chorus and a remarkable case but lately occurred when, but for these too often neglected elements of the opera, Rossini's masterpiece *William Tell* [at Covent Garden] would have proved a dead failure.⁷⁹

Chorley later drew the same conclusion:

It was a sign of change that the departure of a conductor could shake an opera house...That the Italian Opera at Her Majesty's Theatre never recovered the loss of Signor Costa is a matter of operatic history...our world had been educated up to a point at which the entire performance was felt to be the real object of interest...⁸⁰

The extravagant praise for Costa's first season clearly reflected more than partisanship and the work of the claque. Davison wrote of his *Semiramide* that 'Signor Costa... proved his supremacy by the absolute control he exercises over his forces, ensuring every nuance of expression...we seldom witnessed, perhaps never, a more satisfactory musical and dramatic performance'.⁸¹ He described Costa's *Figaro* as 'from the first to the last, irreproachable'.⁸² The Paris critic Fiorentino, criticising a production at the *Théâtre-Italien* in Paris, commented that 'To appreciate *Don Giovanni* one should have heard the Royal Italian Opera in London, the magnificent finale of the first act, with a triple chorus, conducted by Costa with its numerous chorus and a dazzling *mise-en-*

⁷⁸ *MW* (26 Sept. 1846), 458.

⁷⁹ *Times* (25 Aug. 1848).

⁸⁰ Chorley, *Musical Recollections*, 174.

⁸¹ *MW* (10 April 1847), 236-8.

⁸² *MW* (15 July 1848), 451

scène'.⁸³ Hogarth reported that Costa's orchestra had been described by Spohr, Mendelssohn, Verdi, and Thalberg as 'the finest ever collected within the walls of a lyric theatre'.⁸⁴ After two years of charitable neutrality, Davison concurred: Covent Garden's 'inimitable band and chorus' were 'the finest in Europe...Much of this is due to Mr Costa...'.⁸⁵

The consensus that Covent Garden's orchestra and chorus were one of its greatest strengths represented a major shift of attitude.⁸⁶ In praising Covent Garden's ensemble playing, the *Times* stressed 'how much depends upon the orchestra'.⁸⁷ This perception was reflected in the new fashion for applauding the conductor. The frequent curtain calls that Costa received were unusual enough to attract comment. The 1847 season ended with 'Costa coming forward and Tamburini presenting him with a bouquet, whereat the entire house roared tumultuously'.⁸⁸ He had two curtain calls when the Queen paid her first state visit for the premiere of *Les Huguenots*.⁸⁹ At the end of the 1848 season, 'It was a just and graceful compliment to call Costa the conductor before the curtain at the end of the opera to render homage to his genius in putting this season 17 operas on stage with an unprecedented attention to the ensemble'.⁹⁰

The relative weakness of Balfe and his orchestra became more noticeable when Lumley tried in 1848 to raise money by putting on opera concerts. Lumley recalled that 'never

⁸³ Quoted in *MW* (6 Nov. 1847), 702.

⁸⁴ *ILN* (28 Aug. 1847), 139.

⁸⁵ *Times* (25 Aug. 1848).

⁸⁶ *ILN* (10 April 1847), 233-4.

⁸⁷ *Times* (3 Aug. 1856).

⁸⁸ *MW* (14 Aug. 1847), 555.

⁸⁹ *ILN* (29 July 1848), 55.

⁹⁰ *ILN* (14 Aug. 1848), 107.

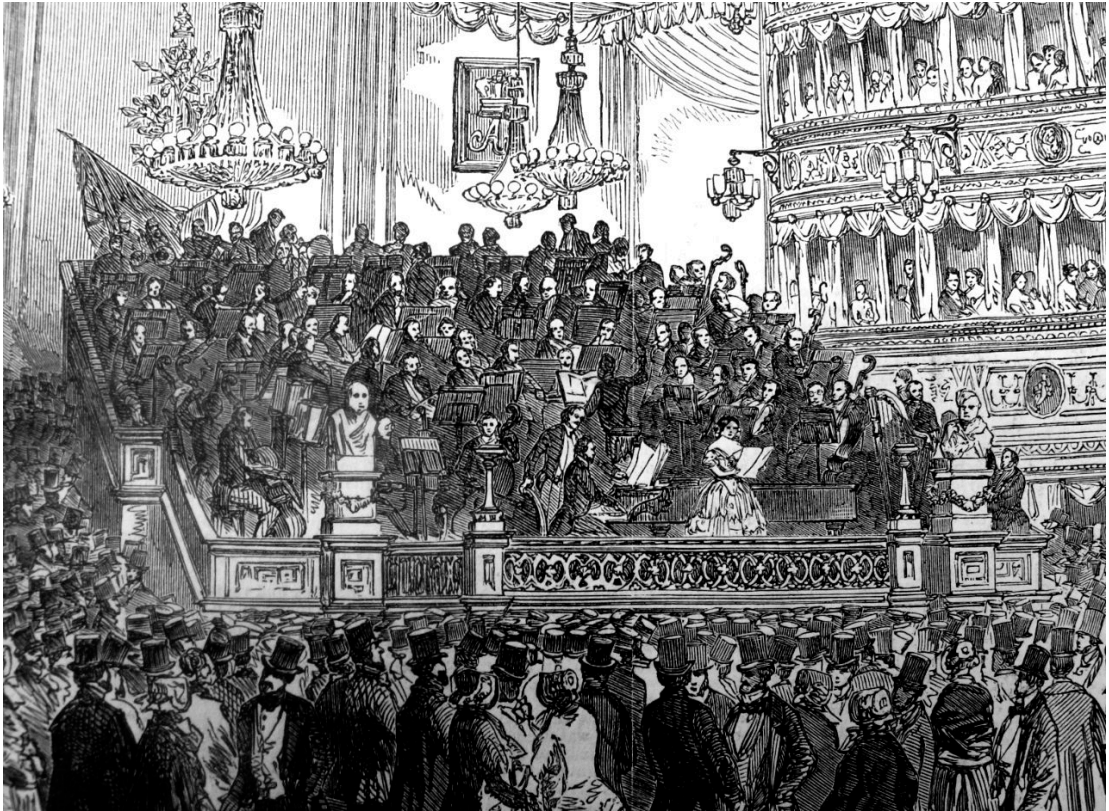


Fig. 6.12 Balfe conducting a Grand National Concert (detail). (*ILN*, 26 Oct.1850).

was failure more signal' (Fig. 6.12).⁹¹ Even the kindly Hogarth expressed the hope that 'finish and polish will no doubt be the result of further familiarity with the great symphonic productions'.⁹² The *Musical World* traced the problem to the shortage of good players: Balfe 'cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear...out of a handful of excellent artists and a host of decayed pensioners and unlearned striplings'.⁹³ Davison repeatedly urged Lumley to 'further improve his band by increasing the force of the stringed instruments and by modifying some of the secondary wind instruments...The chorus is the weakest point of the company...' ⁹⁴ But the shortage of good Continental players became more acute as many drifted home following the collapse of the 1848

⁹¹ Lumley, *Reminiscences*, 290.

⁹² *ILN* (26 Oct. 1850), 333.

⁹³ *MW* (15 July 1848), 450.

⁹⁴ *Times* (26 Aug. 1850).

revolutions. Significantly Lumley's boastful prospectuses (and his later *Reminiscences*) after 1847 virtually never referred to the orchestra and its conductor.

Covent Garden's greatest vulnerability came not from Her Majesty's but from its internal strains and financial weakness. Gye's Diary describes a company seething with rivalries and suspicions between the singers, the conductor, the interim manager Beale and the lease-holder Delafield. Issues of authority and finance brought Costa into conflict with the other principals. Having insisted from the start on 'the privilege of making engagements ad libitum in the musical department', he recruited a staff of 169, which he increased within three years to 191.⁹⁵ He was 'very tenacious of any interference' and complained to Delafield that Gye was meddling with the musical business of the company.⁹⁶ Delafield in turn grumbled about Costa's 'jealousies' and advised Gye 'not to mind Costa nor to consult him about bills'.⁹⁷ There were explosions when Costa 'advised the band and chorus to press their claims'; when he paid the chorus for Passion Week concerts, which were usually performed gratis; when he refused to go into the pit unless his own cheque was honoured; and when he countermanded Delafield's decision to change the curtain time.⁹⁸ By July 1848, they were not on speaking terms. 'Costa would not see Delafield. I persuaded Delafield to write an apology, which he did.'⁹⁹

In July 1849, when Delafield followed Persiani in fleeing to the Continent, the acting manager Beale began taking steps to close the theatre. It was at this critical moment that

⁹⁵ *MW* (26 Dec. 1846), 676.

⁹⁶ Gye, 18 May and 11 April 1848.

⁹⁷ Gye, 27 March 1848.

⁹⁸ Gye, 22 Nov. 1849, 7 and 24 April 1849, 8 May 1848.

⁹⁹ Gye, 26 July 1849.

Gye and Costa agreed to continue to the end of the season. ‘Costa saw the chorus and between us we got all to play without pay.’¹⁰⁰ Gye and Costa agreed to set up a ‘Commonwealth’, in which the artists would perform for a share of any profits.¹⁰¹

6.4.3 The Commonwealth and Gye’s take-over: 1849-52

Covent Garden survived 1849-50 only by operating as a cooperative. The ‘Commonwealth’ involved seven Directors (Grisi, Mario, Tamburini, Costa, Viardot’s husband, Castellan, and Formes) with Gye billed in the 1850 prospectus as acting manager. But most questions of repertory and contracts were in practice settled by Gye, Costa and sometimes Mario. Cox recalled that Costa was ‘the supreme musical as Gye was the chief financial president’ of the Commonwealth.¹⁰²

The *Morning Chronicle* commented prophetically that Commonwealths were ‘pregnant with the seeds of their own dissolution’.¹⁰³ The uncertainty and tensions of the experiment are the main themes of Gye’s diary for 1849-50. The singer-Directors squabbled bitterly over salaries and roles. When Mario proposed raising some soloists’ salaries, while leaving Gye’s and Costa’s as before, ‘Costa made some observations which so incensed Mario that he became like a madman and insulted everyone...’ Costa left and refused to sign for the following year unless Mario apologised.¹⁰⁴ Grisi and Mario tried to evict newcomers who challenged their pre-eminence, especially Pauline Viardot. When Mario announced that he was too hoarse to sing in *La Juive* with Viardot, she refused to sing opposite the second tenor Maralti until fifteen minutes

¹⁰⁰ Gye, 14 July 1849.

¹⁰¹ Gye, 2 Aug. and 28 July 1849.

¹⁰² Cox, *Musical Recollections*, 237.

¹⁰³ *Morning Chronicle* (18 March 1850).

¹⁰⁴ Gye, 3 and 7 Sept. 1850.

before the curtain.¹⁰⁵ It was nevertheless one of the greatest successes of the Commonwealth (Fig. 6.13).

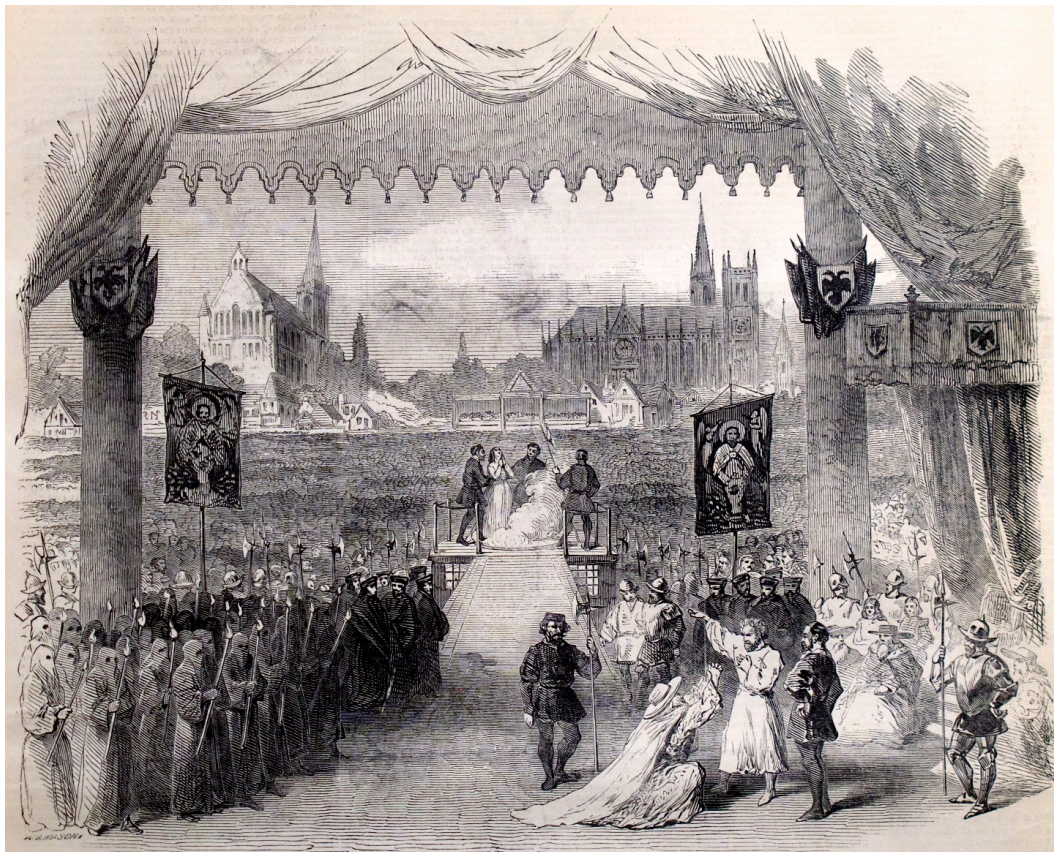


Fig. 6.13 Covent Garden's production of *La Juive*, with Viardot, Mario, Tamberlik, and Formes (1850).

The only point on which the principal singers agreed was the need to reduce spending on the orchestra, chorus and dancers, which brought them directly into conflict with Costa. Repeatedly urging him to cut the players' salaries, Gye was angry to discover that Costa renewed their contracts unchanged after several rejected the proposed new terms.¹⁰⁶ Costa refused to sign his own contract for 1850 unless the rank-and-file players were paid for Easter performances; they were eventually paid for 9 nights in exchange for playing for 12.¹⁰⁷ The Directors agreed to continue in 1851 provided

¹⁰⁵ Gye, 25 July 1850.

¹⁰⁶ Gye, 18 Sept. and 22 Nov. 1849.

¹⁰⁷ Gye, 17 April and 18 May 1850.

‘reductions are to be made in the lower salaries’.¹⁰⁸ Mario delayed signing up for 1851 because ‘He feared that Costa would not reduce the orchestra.’¹⁰⁹

The Commonwealth season showed that a group of artist-directors could run a joint venture with a manager of Gye’s acumen. It made a small profit of about £4,000, enough to give each Director a dividend.¹¹⁰ But it was a stop-gap arrangement, which worked only in the exceptional circumstances of the time. The Directors showed no aptitude for business; their meetings involved ‘a great deal of talk but nothing positively done’.¹¹¹ Gye tried to persuade Costa to invest in the venture but ‘he was frightened’.¹¹² With Costa again fending off suggestions for cutting the chorus and orchestra and some singers flirting with returning to Lumley, Gye concluded that ‘I had better take the whole thing’.¹¹³ He assumed sole financial responsibility in 1851, with loans from friends, including a fatal £5,000 from his then friend Colonel Knox.

During Gye’s first two years of management (1851-2), the competition between the two houses remained acute. Lumley scored some remarkable successes on the strength of his passing stars. In 1850, he produced a world premiere of Halevy’s *La Tempesta* – ‘a new epoch in lyrical art’ (Fig. 6.14).¹¹⁴ He promised UK premieres of five operas, several under the composers themselves, though most did not materialise. In 1851, the year of the Great Exhibition, he put on 60 extra performances, over and above the normal 46 subscription nights. Lumley later called this his *annus mirabilis*. It was a heroic effort:

¹⁰⁸ Gye, 19 and 27 Aug. 1850.

¹⁰⁹ Gye, 22 Sept. 1850.

¹¹⁰ Gye, 7 and 19 Sept. 1850.

¹¹¹ Gye, 26 May 1850.

¹¹² Gye, 10 Sept. 1849 and 1 Aug 1850.

¹¹³ Gye, 1 Sept. 1850.

¹¹⁴ *ILN* (15 June 1850), 425.



Fig. 6.14 One of Lumley's successes: Halevy's *La tempesta* (1850)

in one

week, Her Majesty's performed *Fidelio*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Don Giovanni* (Fig. 6.15), *Norma* and two opera concerts . But Berlioz judged that, in the 1851 productions of *Fidelio*, Covent Garden's chorus was much better prepared than Her Majesty's; and that the latter's *L'Enfant Prodigue*, put on after only ten days of rehearsal crammed in with other productions, was 'barely sketched out'.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Feuillton in *Journal des Débats* (1 July 1851).

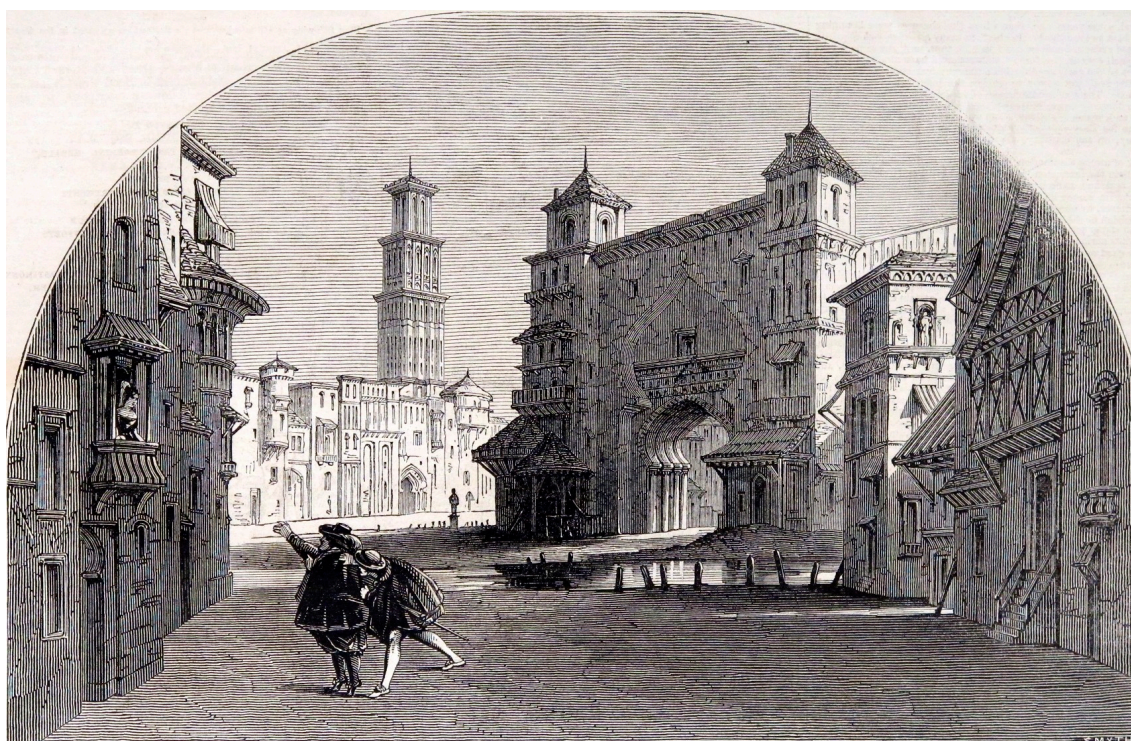


Fig. 6.15 Another of Lumley's successes: *Don Giovanni* (1846).

There are vivid insights into Gye's continuing vulnerability. He feared that he was about to be arrested for debt or in connection with his legal battle with Lumley over the services of Wagner's niece Johanna Wagner in 1853.¹¹⁶ The strains behind the curtain prompted frequent rumours that singers were about to desert. Chorley later wrote that Covent Garden was 'for a time in a state of discontent amounting to anarchy'.¹¹⁷ It was a mark of Gye's anxiety that he opened negotiations with Lumley and the proprietors of Her Majesty's to recreate an Italian opera monopoly in London.¹¹⁸ He was seriously tempted to seek a European monopoly over the singers by taking on the *Opéra-Italien* – a venture that cost the impetuous Lumley nearly £20,000 in 1851-2. But Gye held his nerve and a 'dismal' season at Her Majesty's in 1852 finally sapped even Lumley's remarkable powers of survival. Cancellations became more frequent and promises more untenable, as key members of his company (Cruvelli, Gardoni, even Balfe) deserted the

¹¹⁶ Gye, 11 Jan. 1854

¹¹⁷ Chorley, *Musical Recollections*, 265.

¹¹⁸ Gye, 23 July and 17 Dec. 1847; 18 May 1850; 21 and 25 Dec. 1851; 18 Feb. and 11 Dec. 1852.

sinking ship.¹¹⁹ Unable to secure Johanna Wagner, he tried to get by with ageing divas like Henriette Sontag (Fig. 2.8) and Giuditta Pasta and a rapidly changing cast of new faces.

By May 1852, Lumley was no longer able to run his own house. An emergency meeting of his main subscribers resolved that special measures were needed to keep Her Majesty's afloat in the interest of 'public taste and amusement'. But whereas such aristocratic committees had often rescued the opera in the past, the climate and clientele had changed and they failed to raise the funds he needed.¹²⁰ Lumley was trapped between his tangled lawsuits, exigent creditors, meddling patrons and disgruntled musicians. Instead of responding to Gye's renewed proposals for a partnership, Lumley tried to secure a virtual monopoly in Italian opera through an Act of Parliament. But Gye again outflanked him, organising a petition by theatre managers and lobbying the sympathetic Solicitor General.¹²¹ By February 1853 it was clear that Lumley would be unable to open Her Majesty's.

Lumley's fall was ascribed variously to his obsession with the press (Gruneisen), his arrogance and personal failings (Chorley), the pettiness of the singers (Davison) and the vindictiveness of his main creditor Lord Ward (Lumley). But Costa's and Gye's strengths also played an important part. Costa preserved Covent Garden's musical superiority, while Gye's astute management and agile improvisation enabled him, unlike Lumley, to retain his lease and avoid bankruptcy. Gye was also remarkably lucky; an

119 Lumley, *Reminiscences*, 340.

120 Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts*, 270.

121 Gye, 13 Feb. 1853.

opera-mad officer, Arthur Thistlethwayte, died in the Crimean War, leaving his investment of £12,000 to Gye.¹²²

6.4.4 Covent Garden's Monopoly: 1853-56

The four years of monopoly enabled Covent Garden cautiously to broaden its repertoire: by 1855 its prospectus boasted 46 operas. While it did not succeed with Spohr's *Faust* and *Jessonda*, it found popular (if not critical) success with Verdi's *Rigoletto* and *Il trovatore* (Fig. 6.18) and (with critical and popular favour) Meyerbeer's *L'Etoile du nord* and revivals of *Le prophète* and *Les Huguenots* (Fig. 6.16). The Meyerbeer operas, which suited Covent Garden's large stage, gradually secured the Queen's loyalty. Having attended Covent Garden only nine times in 1847 (against 27 visits to Her Majesty's), Victoria went there 78 times in the next 14 years (compared with only 37 visits to Her Majesty's).¹²³



Figs 6.16/17 The 1849 Covent Garden production of *Le prophète*, which Meyerbeer supervised but Costa conducted. Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791-1864).

The climactic battles of the previous six years took Costa's reputation to its peak. His success in the non-Italian operatic repertoire added to the kudos he was gaining at the

¹²² Gye, 4 Jan. 1853.

¹²³ Ph. D. thesis by M.J. Budds, cited by Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts*, 350.

Philharmonic and the SHS. Gye's business pre-occupations left Costa free to consolidate his hold over the house's musical resources. By the time Covent Garden burnt down in March 1856, Costa and Gye were clearly the twin pillars of London's only successful opera house.



Fig. 6.18 Covent Garden's *Il trovatore* of 1855, with Graziani, Viardot, Tamberlik and Tagliafico.

6.4.5 The Fire and Resumption of War: 1856-58

The heroic efforts of Costa and Gye to sustain the company after the disastrous fire of 1856 are described in Chapter 7. Lumley seized the opportunity to reopen Her Majesty's, with a strong company (Johanna Wagner and Marietta Piccolomini as well as Alboni and the tenor Giulini). He put on another Verdi premiere (*Luisa Miller*) and a production of *Les Huguenots*, in which Thérèse Tietjens emerged as a major force (Fig. 7.6). The critics judged that his production of *Il trovatore* at least equalled that of his rival. Lumley was convinced that, if he could continue for two more years, 'the rival house must necessarily succumb'.¹²⁴ But his opportunism cost Lumley the support of

¹²⁴ Lumley, *Reminiscences*, 444.

the Queen, who declined to take her box at Her Majesty's Theatre.¹²⁵ By May 1856, when Gye and Costa opened at the Lyceum, they had the sympathy of the Royal Family and most of the press.

Despite having pronounced that Costa 'could never again resume his post under any circumstances whatever', Lumley tried to entice him back to Her Majesty's to replace Balfe (Appendix B). But Costa stood by Gye and Lumley had to fall back on another indifferent conductor, Bonetti. Chorley continued to expose the comparative weakness of the musicians at Her Majesty's ('coarse, feeble and defective').¹²⁶ In his end-of-season report, he savaged Lumley and Bonetti. 'Small care has been bestowed on the conductorship of the fair band – on the assemblage of a good chorus'.¹²⁷

Although Lumley remained musically weaker, his fatal vulnerability was financial and legal. To finance his re-opening, Lumley had to sell his lease to Lord Ward, who had 'the Cerberus-like position of patron, landlord and creditor, all in one'.¹²⁸ Lumley believed they had a gentleman's agreement that his rent would be deferred while he found the funds to buy back the lease. But Ward demanded prompt payment, which forced Lumley to surrender his sub-lease in August and abandon Italian opera.¹²⁹

The rivalry between the two houses in the period 1846-58 saw several important artistic changes. It witnessed a golden age of grand opera, with productions of Meyerbeer of a scale and finish that had not previously been known in London. It marked the

¹²⁵ Phipps-Lumley (25 April, 7 May, 30 June and 1 July 1856), collection of the late Tony Gasson. Victoria later took her box for the last weeks of the season but she took a triple box for Gye's season.

¹²⁶ *Athenaeum* (24 May 1856), 657.

¹²⁷ *Athenaeum* (8 Aug. 1857), 1012.

¹²⁸ Lumley, *Reminiscences*, 391.

¹²⁹ Lumley, *The Earl of Dudley, Mr. Lumley and Her Majesty's Theatre: A Narrative of Facts Addressed to the Patrons of the Opera, His Friends, and the Public Generally* (London: Bosworth and Harrison, 1863), 6-7.

emergence of an operatic canon (Chapter 9). It registered the importance of coherent management and the disciplined ensemble playing and singing that could be supplied only by a powerful professional conductor.

Lumley's downfall did not, however, lead to the operatic monopoly that Gye sought, nor the more orderly environment that Costa craved. In the next ten years, Covent Garden's formula of sound management and good ensemble was tested even more severely by a more formidable opponent – the wily 'Colonel' Mapleson, who took over Her Majesty's in 1862 (Fig. 7.8). The battle of the opera houses, which was to continue through the 1860s and 70s, again revolved not around their repertoires (which remained very similar) or their casts (which were evenly matched) but around the quality of their managers and conductors and the complex relationship between them. It was a struggle in which the successful partnership between Gye and Costa would eventually split apart.

Chapter 7: Covent Garden: Costa and Gye: 1850-69

7.1 The Costa-Gye Partnership



Fig. 7.1 Gye - still honoured at Covent Garden.

The twenty year partnership between Frederick Gye (Fig. 7.1) and Costa was the most important of their respective careers and the longest in the history of opera in England. It was forged in their traumatic first years at Covent Garden (Chapter 6). When Persiani fled to Paris, Gye was persuaded, after much hesitation, to take on the management of all aspects ‘except the music department’, which remained Costa’s domain.¹ After Delafield too fled to the Continent in July 1849, it was Costa and Gye who decided to keep the theatre open with a ‘Commonwealth’ of artists. The troubles of the first four

years at Covent Garden left both Costa and Gye badly bruised and shaped their respective attitudes. Initially this common experience bound them into a successful partnership, though the different lessons that they drew from the early years eventually led them into bitter conflict.

¹ Gye, 14 Feb. 1848.

By surviving for nearly thirty years in the notoriously risky world of opera management, Gye deserves to be recognised as one of the cultural heroes of the age. Although not musically adventurous, he was the most successful of the mid-Victorian opera managers. His success rested on his remarkable energy, tact, business flair and tenacity. He was driven by pragmatic rather than musical considerations. For example, he allowed Carl Rosa's wife Parepa to sing *Norma* in exchange for Rosa taking £300 worth of boxes and stalls.² When he needed someone's services, he could flatter and humour with gifts of grouse, eggs, strawberries and opera cloaks (Fig. 7.2). He was described by Patti's brother-in-law, as 'le modèle des directeurs...un peu rude de formes, très autoritaire, mais esclave à sa parole qui valait tous les écrits et sa signature'.³ But his Diary reveals a man ruled by suspicion. His shabby treatment of Mario and Grisi at the end of their careers showed that he could be brutal when he no longer needed them.

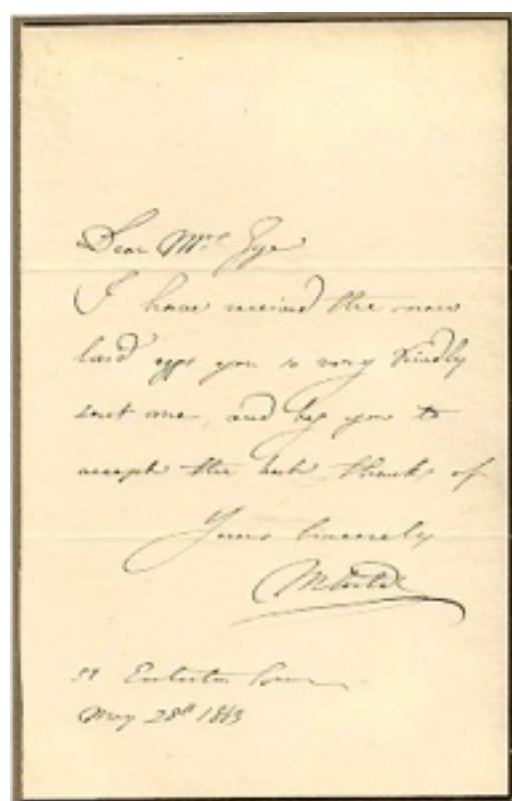


Fig. 7.2 Letter from Costa thanking Gye for sending a box of eggs.

Gye began on bad terms with Costa, who suspected him of interfering with the musical department. Gye in turn found him jealous and inflexible, but he increasingly acted as a peacemaker between Costa and the rest of the management. It was Gye who stopped Beale from taking Costa at his word in April 1849 when he threatened to resign. When

² Gye, 16 June 1872.

³ Strakosch, *Souvenirs d'un Impresario* (Paris: Ollendorf, 1887), 28.

Costa complained to Delafield about Gye's interference, Gye took him aside 'in a conciliatory manner' and did not react when Costa responded abruptly. Gye climbed down after Costa objected to his hiring Maretzek, whom Costa described as 'a Lumleyite', to compose music for the ballet.⁴

Thanks mainly to Gye's patience and flexibility, they gradually learnt to work together to keep Covent Garden afloat. Typical Diary entries show them trying to find someone to stand in for the frequently 'indisposed' Mario.⁵ Covent Garden survived artistically in 1850 because Costa was able to put on 68 performances of 17 operas to a standard that eclipsed those at Her Majesty's. It survived financially because Gye took a grip on the company's runaway costs, slashing the ballet and dropping Alboni.

For two decades from 1849, they ran Covent Garden in close cooperation. Costa was the only person to whom Gye revealed his plans to take over the lease. 'Don't mention to anyone that I have the theatre. Not yet certain.'⁶ It was a sign of Costa's importance that the owners of Covent Garden granted Gye his lease only after he had a written commitment from Costa and Mario; and that they abandoned their attempts to revise the terms when told that Costa had already approved the contract.⁷ When Gye considered offering Mario and Grisi two-thirds of the profits to prevent them from deserting, his business partner Colonel Knox advised him to clear this with Costa first.

But it was an uneven partnership. Gye was distracted by financial and legal worries and often made no mention in his Diary of the mainstream business of the opera – the casting, rehearsals and performances. He commented rarely on the quality of Covent

⁴ Gye, 25 April 1849, 18 May 1848 and 20 March 1848.

⁵ Gye, 8 May 1848 and 25 July 1850.

⁶ ROHC, Gye-Costa corr. (10 Feb. 1851).

⁷ Gye, 13 and 18 Sept. 1849.

Garden productions, often simply noting the daily house takings. Costa, by contrast, worked single-mindedly to build on the powers he had built up over the previous twenty years. With Gye still learning the operatic ropes, it was Costa alone who could guarantee three performances a week. During his 22 years at Covent Garden, Costa averaged over 70 performances each season - 59 different operas in all. Gye boasted that many works could be substituted 'at a few hours' notice'. Dideriksen takes this at face value, noting that Gye was able to fill in for the cancellation of *Benvenuto Cellini* in 1853 with 'no discernible logistical problems'.⁸ But this surely underestimates the enormous strain that the frequent last-minute changes of cast and opera must have placed on the singers, musicians and especially on Costa.

Gye's kid-glove treatment of Costa shows how much he depended on him. When Grisi announced that she was too ill to sing in *Semiramide*, it was Costa who went to her house and persuaded her to perform.⁹ Costa inveigled Labache from Her Majesty's to Covent Garden in 1854. Gye also needed Costa's close links with the Royal Family, for example to make arrangements for the French State Visit of 1855.¹⁰ One insight into their partnership is that until the mid-1860s, Costa's name rarely appears in the Diary among the problems that Gye often listed at the top of the day's entry.

Costa was also a useful sounding board, especially on the manoeuvres of the artistes and the opposition. He wrote from his holiday retreat in Folkestone to warn Gye that Colonel Knox's lawyers were trying to persuade him to sign an affidavit against Gye.¹¹ He tipped Gye off about Lumley's and Mapleson's manoeuvres to entice Mario and

⁸ Dideriksen, 192.

⁹ Gye, 3 April 1848.

¹⁰ Gye, 12 April and 17 May 1851.

¹¹ Gye, 30 Jan. 1863.

Grisi back to Her Majesty's and about Beale 'telling all sorts of lies about me to Grisi and Mario'.¹² Costa's reports about Lumley's efforts to draw him back to Her Majesty's no doubt reminded Gye that he could not take his services for granted.¹³

In general it was Gye who made the running to preserve the relationship. When he noticed that Costa was sulking, 'I called on him and, after hearing a number of petty *amour-propre* grievances all meaning nothing, made things smooth again'.¹⁴ When Costa threatened to quit, Gye calmed him down by the mixture of half-apology and flattery at which he was so accomplished. 'Your letter has quite frightened me... Do please come and fill that place which no other can as yours. I hope it is not too late to send the tickets for your friends'.¹⁵ He put up with Costa's refusal to go recruiting on the Continent or to compose pieces to fill out shorter opera evenings (on the grounds that he was too busy and that this went beyond his contract).¹⁶

Having defeated Lumley, the Gye-Costa partnership faced its second major test when Covent Garden was burnt down in 1856 (Fig. 7.3). The fire destroyed the company's costumes, sets and many of its scores: only Gye's papers and Costa's piano were rescued. The Queen toured the ruins in evident distress and the *ILN* feared that Covent Garden would survive only as 'a reminiscence and a name'. But Gye and Costa rose to the challenge. Gye borrowed sets of scores in Paris and persuaded the leading singers to

¹² Gye, 4 July 1863 and 13 Nov. 1850.

¹³ Gye, 7 July 1852, 18 April 1853, 30 March 1854, 30 May 1854.

¹⁴ Gye, 19 Aug. 1853.

¹⁵ ROHC, Gye-Costa corr. (7 Aug. 1854).

¹⁶ Gye, 2 and 25 April 1849, 20 March and 18 May 1848, 23 June 1866.



Fig. 7.3 Queen Victoria tours the ruins of Covent Garden (1856).

accept a 25% cut in salary.¹⁷ He then dashed back to London to hire the Lyceum, where they re-opened less than six weeks later. Costa spurned Lumley's invitation back to Her Majesty's and set about adapting the programme to the Lyceum, which was too small for their Meyerbeerian money-spinners. Costa persuaded the musicians to accept salary cuts and rotated them in the smaller repertoire works, so that no one deserted the company. They also set up a series of concerts in the reopened Crystal Palace, which brought in £1,400.

During the two-year 'exile' at the Lyceum, the company did not offer any new operas. But Hogarth commended them for putting on 'the masterpieces of the Italian school in a manner which had never been surpassed'.¹⁸ The *Times* praised the 'undiminished excellence' of Costa's reduced orchestra, commenting that he would stay loyal even if the company relocated to the Marionettes.¹⁹ The conductor Arditi's first experience of

¹⁷ Zelger's evidence in *Knox versus Gye* in Chancery, 1 Oct. 1862.

¹⁸ *ILN* (9 Aug. 1856), 157.

¹⁹ *Times* (15 April 1857).

the company was a performance of *Rigoletto* ‘superbly conducted’ by Costa.²⁰ The 1857 season yielded a useful profit of £3,375.

The Lyceum period probably marked the peak of Costa’s influence in the company. Gye feared that, if Costa declined to conduct the Crystal Palace concerts (as he was threatening), the singers would also refuse and the company would founder.²¹ In the event, ‘the band came and Costa settled with them’. Costa was the only member of the company with whom Gye shared his plans for the Lyceum. Gye reported from Paris on the singers he had signed up: ‘I thought you would like to hear how our affairs progressed’.²² He consulted Costa about the options for what he called the ‘*risorgimento*’ of Covent Garden. With Costa’s encouragement, he tried to lease Her Majesty’s before eventually deciding to rebuild Covent Garden to a design by Edward Barry (Fig. 7.4).²³

In October 1857, overcome by his exertions, Gye took to his bed and did not visit the opera for eight months. The burden of opening the new Covent Garden and presenting 44 performances in 1858 fell mainly on Costa. For the Queen’s visit in June 1858, Gye wrote (in a shaky hand) from his bed ‘Would you be kind enough to make out the programme and as attractive as you can. I need not say how much obliged I should be if you would conduct.’²⁴

²⁰ Arditi, *Reminiscences*, 37.

²¹ Gye, 17 March and 4 April 1856.

²² ROHC, Gye-Costa corr. (31 March 1856); Gye, June-Nov. 1856.

²³ ‘*Risorgimento*’ in Gye, 29 June 1856. Gye, 13 Feb. 1857.

²⁴ ROHC, Gye-Costa corr. (4 June 1858).

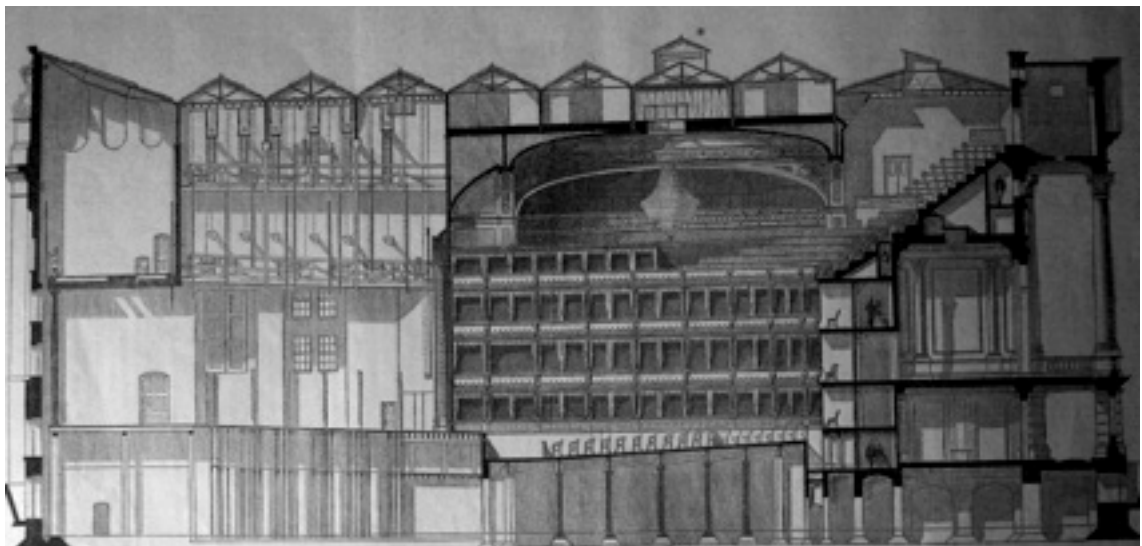


Fig. 7.4 Edward Barry's design for the rebuilding of Covent Garden (1857).

These years also marked the high point for their partnership. Gye's correspondence shows a warmer tone after the fire, moving from 'My dear Sir' to 'My dear Costa' or 'My dear friend'. But it remained a marriage of convenience and they were never socially close: Gye several times noted that he had not seen Costa from the end of one season to the start of another. Their personalities contrasted vividly. Costa was introverted, inflexible, cautious, obsessed with order and the authority he needed to impose it. Gye was extraverted, entrepreneurial, suspicious and interfering. Costa's dedication to his musical duties was almost monastic and his hobbies were private – silverware, horses and collecting clocks.²⁵ Gye had a large family, numerous business and intellectual interests outside the theatre and was not too concerned about musical finish. Their main points in common were a recipe for friction: both were legalistic and hungry for power and efficiency. The remarkable thing is that, despite their deep differences, they managed to work together effectively for twenty years.

The decade after the reopening of Covent Garden in 1858 saw Costa and Gye come increasingly into conflict. But this slow divorce took place against the backcloth of productions of a quality and polish that were, in some styles, never exceeded. *Dinorah*

²⁵ *Vanity Fair* profile of 1872,

in 1859, for example, led Chorley to recall that ‘Nothing of the kind is now attainable in any other European theatre’.²⁶ *Don Giovanni* in 1861 (with Patti, Tamberlik, Ronconi, Grisi, Formes, Tagliafico and Csillag) was remembered by Herman Klein ‘as a treasured memory, as in a sense the operatic *clou* of the mid-Victorian era’.²⁷ The *Examiner* reflected Costa’s critical contribution to this: ‘Covent Garden has the advantage in the rare perfection of the instrumental performance of every piece that is produced.’²⁸

7.2 Issues of Opera Management

Many minor irritants gnawed at their relationship and were amplified when Gye let off steam in his Diary. Plenty of people in the opera world were keen to feed Gye’s suspicious nature. In 1854, he recorded a report from a contact that Costa was behind defamatory rumours against him and was ‘a great enemy of mine’.²⁹ When Lucca created difficulties about her part in Verdi’s *Don Carlos*, Gye speculated that Costa had put her up to it.³⁰ Gye was annoyed when Costa advised the bass Attri not to deputise in *Les Huguenots*, since it might harm his reputation.³¹ He was put out to receive a letter of thanks from the Amateur Musical Society for lending them three musicians, which he had refused but Costa had authorised.³²

Much of their mutual exasperation was due to the normal strains of running an opera house. But, by the standards of the opera world, their working relationship was

²⁶ Chorley, *Musical Recollections*, 395.

²⁷ Klein, *The Reign of Patti*, 85.

²⁸ *Examiner* (3 June 1865).

²⁹ Gye, 21 April 1854.

³⁰ Gye, 5 June 1867.

³¹ Gye, 5 May 1864.

³² Gye, 22 June 1852.

remarkably durable and effective. The picture that emerges is of two autocrats cooperating well enough to contain the two most sensitive issues between them: finance and authority.

7.2.1 Finances

The essential context of Gye's management was his fragile financial position. The opera accounts are unreliable evidence: Gye channelled some incomes elsewhere and exaggerated his expenses – for example announcing a high salary for Patti to satisfy her *amour-propre* on condition that some of it was refunded to him.³³ Overall, he appears to have made an average loss of about £3,000 up to 1851-4 and a modest net profit in 1855-8.³⁴ He paid progressively more to his top soloists, who saw him not as a partner in a battle for survival but as the manager of a flourishing opera house. In 1853, he begged his bankers, Coutt's, to carry over his loan because of 'the many contrary circumstances of the last opera season'. Three years later, he had to pledge his family jewels as security for a loan.³⁵

Costa had neither the capital nor the business enterprise to share Gye's financial risks. In 1851, he agreed to work for £1,200, two-thirds of what he had received from the profligate Delafield.³⁶ This was raised to £1,300 in 1858 and £1,500 in 1862 after he agreed to conduct for four nights a week. By 1866, he was being paid £2,000 (the same as Gye claimed to be taking).³⁷ Gye's willingness to pay him more than anyone except Patti, Lucca and Mario is a mark of his anxiety to retain Costa's services.

³³ Gye, 12 Feb. 1865. Dideriksen and Ringel, 28.

³⁴ Figures (and caveats) in Dideriksen and Gye versus Knox PRO, C16/31/K27 29 April and 15 Sept. 1861.

³⁵ Gye 15 Jan. 1853 and 9 Jan. 1856.

³⁶ Gye, 5 March 1851.

³⁷ Gye, 25 Jan. and 1 Feb. 1868.

Costa knew that Gye's cash flow problems were real, but he was exigent about payment. In a typical exchange in 1866, Gye explained that some subscribers had gone away without paying: 'I am very *very* sorry but I really cannot help it. Believe me'. Costa refused to defer the final £400 of his salary and referred him to his solicitor, Cotherell. Gye later sent a cheque for £200 and a box of grouse, but losses on Covent Garden's concert series forced him to carry the remaining £200 into 1867.³⁸ The next year Cotherell threatened a writ for the non-payment of £400. Gye expressed surprise that:

after so many years with him and after having paid him some £20,000 odd, he should threaten me with legal proceedings for £400...I told him of the non-success of [Verdi's] *Don Carlos* and of the concerts and that I really could not pay the £400 at present. After a long conversation, I proposed to pay £200 in February and £200 in April.³⁹

More serious for Gye than Costa's salary was his inability to control the cost of the musicians whom he saw as an attractive target for economies. Gye understood that the new repertory of Meyerbeer and middle Verdi called for larger numbers of capable musicians. But he continued to press for ways of reducing their wages. For Costa, this raised issues of musical standards and welfare as well as authority. John Ella may have been exaggerating when he claimed that salaries of soloists had doubled and of musicians halved between 1830 and 1870. But the rank-and-file musicians were dangerously close to what Dickens and Thackeray called the 'shabby-genteel people', obliged to maintain a middle-class image on the basis of a frugal salary.⁴⁰

As early as 1849, Gye thought he had persuaded Costa to cut the musicians' rates by a quarter, but he discovered that Costa had not done so for fear of losing some of his best

³⁸ ROHC, Gye-Costa corr. (12 and 17 Aug. 1966). Gye, 12 and 17 Aug., 17 Sept. and 5 Dec. 1866.

³⁹ Gye, 12 Oct. 1867.

⁴⁰ Dickens, *Sketches by Boz* (1836), vol. 3, chapter X; Thackeray, *A Shabby-Genteel Story*, (1840 unfinished).

players.⁴¹ Gye warned that ‘he would be the ruin of the theatre’. He tried to negotiate direct with the chorus ‘who were as usual quite unreasonable’ and significantly it was Costa who persuaded them to sing.⁴² After the 1856 fire, Gye secured a salary cut of one-eighth, but Costa and the musicians saw this as a temporary concession and it remained a vexed issue between them.⁴³ In 1866, Gye rejected the band’s demand to restore the one-eighth, ‘but of course as usual he took their part’.⁴⁴

Costa’s day-to-day management of the orchestra enabled him to evade Gye’s fiscal austerity, as when he opened the chorus pay-list a day earlier than Gye wished in 1866.⁴⁵ But Gye appreciated that Costa’s regime was cost-effective for him. When the players demanded an increase in 1866, Costa advised him correctly that they would not press their case.⁴⁶ Gye often asked him to mediate in his disputes with the musicians or soloists.⁴⁷ They gradually found their way to an arrangement under which Costa drafted the musicians’ contracts and sent them to Gye for signature.

7.2.2 Authority

Costa and Gye’s sparring over his contract, summarised at Appendix A, was a regular feature of their relationship. Although Gye was pernickety about legal details, he had little choice but to allow Costa to build on the terms he had enjoyed as a founder member of Covent Garden. Costa’s contractual position in the late-1860s marks the high

⁴¹ Gye, 22 Nov. 1849 and 5 March 1851.

⁴² Gye, 7 April 1849.

⁴³ Appendix A.

⁴⁴ Gye, 11 Jan. 1865.

⁴⁵ Gye, 7 Feb. 1866.

⁴⁶ Gye, 3 Aug. 1866.

⁴⁷ For example, with Jeanne Castellan. Gye, 19 June 1855.

point of authority to which the new profession of conductor could aspire. Conflicts of authority manifested themselves in six areas.

Rehearsals

Disputes about the time allowed for preparing performances, a feature of London's musical life, became more acute in the later years of the partnership. Costa's contract obliged Gye to give him enough notice of each production 'so as to enable Mr Costa to *prepare it to his satisfaction*'. But there were frequent clashes when Costa demanded postponement to ensure proper rehearsal, a concern shared by some of the singers.⁴⁸ Costa's perfectionism gave Gye an edge over Her Majesty's. In 1861 Gye's delayed production of *Un ballo in maschera* was commended after Mapleson had mounted a hurried performance. When persuaded by Costa not to commit himself absolutely to doing Meyerbeer's *Dinorah* in 1859, Gye won credit in the press for his honesty.⁴⁹ Frustrating though it was, Costa's caution saved Gye from making Lumley's mistake of promising what could not be delivered (Chapter 6).

But Gye was frustrated by Costa's frequent demands to postpone performances, as when Mapleson scooped his production of *Faust* in 1863: 'the letting is very good and this postponement will be very injurious'. But 'of course I could not make him go into the orchestra...I at last put the music off til Thursday to my great loss'.⁵⁰ In 1864, Costa demanded six rehearsals of *La fille du regiment*, 'which we gave last year and now only change one character. I have put off [Flotow's] *Stradella* twice to please him'.⁵¹ Gye

⁴⁸ Grisi and Mario frequently opposed Gye's plans for premature performance: eg Grisi in *La favorita* in 1850.

⁴⁹ *Athenaeum* (5 March 1859), 327.

⁵⁰ Gye, 25 and 26 June 1863.

⁵¹ Gye, 24 May 1864.

complained that Costa ‘made all sorts of difficulties about rehearsals. He always finds difficulties and never suggests a remedy’.⁵²

They nearly came to blows in 1866 when Costa called a morning rehearsal that threatened to run over into a concert that Gye had arranged for the afternoon. Gye’s account shows how quickly minor issues could become a conflict of personality between them:

Costa said in his disagreeable way ‘I have got my rehearsal and when I have finished the band will go. (There is no band for the concert). What’s that to me, your concert?’ I said of course the theatre must be cleared before the concert people can come in. He said ‘That’s nothing to me. I know my business and I shall finish my rehearsal’. I ought to have knocked him down! But the rehearsal was going on and I left him...It is almost impossible to put up with him.⁵³

On this occasion, Costa uncharacteristically gave way, bringing his rehearsal forward by half an hour to avoid a clash. In July 1868, Costa stormed out after Gye accused him of saying that Auber’s *Le domino noir* was ready, despite the fact that Helen Sherrington (the soprano) had not rehearsed once. Gye later ‘found him pacing up and down Hart St waiting for a cab’ and asked him to name a date for the first night, but received no answer.⁵⁴ When Costa dropped a rehearsal of *Fra Diavolo* because Mario had failed to apologise for skipping an earlier rehearsal, Gye told him that private affairs should not interfere with the programme of the house.⁵⁵

Meyerbeer’s and Halevy’s operas, with their heavy demands on numbers and orchestral effects, brought Costa’s perfectionism into deeper conflict with Gye’s business exigencies. In 1864, Costa decreed that *L’Etoile du nord* was not ready. ‘I told him the

⁵² Gye, 31 March 1864. Gye, 16 June 1865.

⁵³ Gye, 12 June 1866.

⁵⁴ Gye, 14 July 1868.

⁵⁵ Gye, 16 June 1865.

Etoile must be done. He tries to thwart everything.’⁵⁶ They ‘nearly came to ‘words’ over the preparation of *L’Africaine*. Gye had seen the Paris version and recognised that it would need ‘an immense deal of altering and cutting’.⁵⁷ But he suspected that Costa was unsympathetic to Meyerbeer’s operas and wanted ‘to get out of doing the *Africaine*’.⁵⁸ This seems improbable. Meyerbeer enthusiastically endorsed Costa’s conducting of his works and was one of the two modern composers whom Costa contracted to conduct. He put on 155 Meyerbeer performances in his last decade at Covent Garden, 22 of *L’Africaine*. Indeed the ‘completeness and excellence’ of these performances were described in Gye’s obituary as the ‘distinctive feature’ of the house.⁵⁹

Moonlighting

Gye’s frustration about delayed productions was linked to his irritation at Costa taking many of the players away from the opera house to perform on the festival circuit. Absences for duties at the Philharmonic and the Ancient Concerts had long been sanctioned.⁶⁰ By the 1850s, however, the growth of the festival phenomenon – and Costa’s central place in it – meant that members of the opera orchestra were in greater demand elsewhere. Gye naturally resented these absences, for which he received no compensation. In 1854, he went down to Sydenham to try (unsuccessfully) to withhold permission for his orchestra to play under Costa for the reopening of the Crystal Palace.⁶¹ He calculated that he lost over £600 from the orchestra’s absence at the 1862

⁵⁶ Gye, 16 June 1864.

⁵⁷ Gye, 11 Jan. 1865.

⁵⁸ Gye, 9 June 1865. See also Chapter 9.4..

⁵⁹ *London Standard* (5 Dec. 1878).

⁶⁰ Ella’s contract of 21 Aug. 1846 is summarised at Appendix A.

⁶¹ Bowley, *Re-opening of the Crystal Palace*.

Exhibition. In May 1865, Costa asked to change the opera because he needed to rehearse the players for the SHS premiere of his oratorio *Naaman*. ‘This is too bad and cannot last!’⁶² In June of the same year, Costa missed a performance before the Prince of Wales, arguing that he was too tired to conduct three nights in succession, but Gye discovered that he had been rehearsing the Handel Festival chorus.⁶³ Two days later, the players were not available to rehearse because they were at the Handel Festival. Gye complained that he ‘had given them no permission to go...But Costa having accepted the conductorship, I am to be sacrificed’.⁶⁴ The orchestra was absent for three days in the following week. ‘The fact is the fault is all Costa’s. He knew perfectly well... that it would stop my rehearsals; but, as he most improperly had engaged himself, he winked at the band going’.⁶⁵

In 1866, Gye told Costa that the opera orchestra ‘must be at my call whenever I needed them’.⁶⁶ But the next year, when the players petitioned Costa to negotiate on their behalf, he forced Gye to add to their contracts a provision that ‘they shall be at liberty to attend music festivals’.⁶⁷ This problem, intimately linked to Costa’s control over players’ contracts and his own availability for extra opera nights (see below), was insoluble while Gye had only one conductor at his disposal.

⁶² Gye, 9 May 1865.

⁶³ Gye, 17 June 1865.

⁶⁴ Gye, 19 June 1865.

⁶⁵ Gye, 22 and 23 June 1865.

⁶⁶ Gye, 5 June 1866.

⁶⁷ Memorandum of 8 Jan. 1867, ROHC. See Appendix A.

Deputy Conductor

To reduce his dependence on Costa's availability, Gye repeatedly 'begged' him to engage another conductor 'under him', for which Gye would pay – 'but as usual uselessly. And so I am sacrificed'.⁶⁸ Gye called at Costa's house to suggest engaging 'a M Gianelli, *maestro al piano* at Madrid, to help him but he was against it'.⁶⁹ Gye appointed Bottesini, assuring Costa that he would conduct only at concerts. But Costa objected and, according to Arditi, 'poor Bottesini... was, as a matter of fact, never for one night allowed the privilege of wielding the Wand'.⁷⁰

Gye's concern to install a deputy was sharpened by the sporadic rumours that Costa was about to defect to another company.⁷¹ Costa gave sporadic hints that he planned to leave. After their disagreement about *Le prophète*, he told Gye that he would be able to do as he liked next season, 'meaning probably that he would not remain with me...'⁷² In 1866, the Prince of Wales mentioned to Gye that Costa was going to become Director of the National Training School of Music, predecessor of the Royal College of Music.⁷³ But three days later, Costa and Gye talked of the following year's arrangements in a way that led Gye to comment 'This does not look as if he has thoughts of leaving me... Yet I heard that Costa had said something of the kind to Strakosch and Mario 2 or 3

⁶⁸ Gye, 20 June 1865.

⁶⁹ Gye, 7 Feb. 1866.

⁷⁰ Arditi, *Reminiscences*, 235.

⁷¹ Gye, 7 July 1852, 18 April 1853, 30 March 1854, 30 May 1854, 4 and 28 April 1864. Mapleson, *Memoirs*, 29.

⁷² Gye, 6 and 18 May 1864.

⁷³ Gye, 25 June 1866. Costa accepted the post at a salary of £1200 pa and a residence. But the project fell through. Bennett, *Life of Bennett*, 350.

weeks since'.⁷⁴ Gye's determination to reinsure by appointing two conductors for 1869 was a major reason for Costa's resignation.

Extra nights

In his quest to raise revenue, Gye sought to put on performances on Mondays (from 1861) and Fridays (from 1864), exploiting the fact that the musicians could not claim full pay for extra nights. Having averaged 65 performances a season before 1856, Gye put on 78 a year in 1861-67.⁷⁵ This became another issue with Costa, who wanted to keep Mondays and Fridays free for the Sacred Harmonic Society and the festivals.

When Gye complained that Costa was skipping Monday performances, despite the fact that his salary had been raised to £1,500 to cover them, Costa blandly replied that the salary rise was agreed because he often conducted on Mondays.⁷⁶ The following year, they again clashed when Gye billed Costa to conduct on a Monday without consulting him. Costa told a member of Gye's staff 'I shall conduct on Monday, but mind you never take a liberty with me again, neither you nor Mr Gye!!!'⁷⁷ They eventually agreed in 1866 to make Monday a regular Covent Garden night in exchange for raising Costa's salary to £2,000.

Musical authority

As a newcomer to the opera house, Gye at first treated Costa's musical domain with tact. He wrote from Berlin 'I have the names of several musicians who could come in case you should have found any difficulty with our people – yet you would of course

⁷⁴ Gye, 28 June 1866.

⁷⁵ Ringel, 92.

⁷⁶ Gye, 3 May 1864.

⁷⁷ Gye, 12 May 1865.

have written me if any had existed'.⁷⁸ When Mellon proved unable to handle the Covent Garden concert series, Gye wrote diplomatically to make sure that Costa approved the engagement of a successor. But as he grew more confident about his own judgement, Gye began to interfere in the musical side. He advised Costa how to handle the singers – holding them to ambitious deadlines: 'I have often told C that the only way to make them study is to say the opera must be given'.⁷⁹ In 1864, Nantier-Didiée, due to sing Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*, wanted Costa to transpose 'Batti batti' and 'Vedrai carino':

He said this was impossible and then left the theatre, although he knew I should be back in a few minutes and the great difficulty I was in !!! He Director of Music too!! Li Calsi [the *maestro al cembalo*] was there, too and frightened out of his life to alter the music. I sent for Horton [the librarian/copyist] who said the orchestra could transpose the *Vedrai carino* but not the other, so I told him to put on as many hands as possible and recopy the parts before night...All went well...I hear that Costa was on the stage...little expecting to see *Don Giovanni*.⁸⁰

Gye initially recognised that Costa was 'the most competent judge' of the singers.⁸¹

Costa remained influential not only with the Old Guard but also with the next

generation, especially Adelina Patti, who wrote at the end of her first season thanking

him for 'how much you have done for me' and later published a homage to him (Fig.

7.5).⁸² But as Gye became more self-confident, he began to criticise Costa's judgement.

'Costa advised me not to engage Pischek...he said he sang very badly in Italian, but had

never seen him act – he also advised me against Bosio I remember!!' After the success

of *L'Africaine*, Gye noted that 'Lucca and Wachtel had the honours altho' Costa wanted

⁷⁸ ROHC, Gye-Costa corr. (10 Feb. 1851).

⁷⁹ Gye, 4 June 1866.

⁸⁰ Gye, 17 June 1864.

⁸¹ Gye, 10 Jan. 1850.

⁸² Letter of 24 Aug. 1862, quoted by J.F. Cone, *Adelina Patti Queen of Hearts* (Hants: Scholar Press, 1994), 49.

me to take their parts away saying they were both so stupid and they could never sing them'.⁸³ Such point-scoring is typical of Gye's Diary. It needs to be balanced against Mapleson's admission that he suffered a 'dismal fiasco' when he cast an Italian soprano for *Faust*, against Costa's advice.⁸⁴

Management of the Opera House

Costa's insistence on receiving at least 6 weeks' notice of new operas (and one week's notice for other productions) speaks eloquently of his frustration at Gye's frequent changes of programme, which happened on average for one production in six during the 1860s.⁸⁵ His obsession with orderly programming led him to insist on his contractual right to superintend all aspects of the music. In 1854, Gye complained that 'Costa treated me in a very extraordinary manner, almost as if I were his servant instead of he mine'.⁸⁶ The illusion that Costa was Gye's servant – or vice versa – provides a clue to the central power struggle at the core of their relationship. Gye complained in the privacy about Costa's:



Fig. 7.5 Patti's 'Hommage à l'éminent compositeur, Michael Costa'.

⁸³ Gye, 12 May 1854 and 22 June 1865.

⁸⁴ Mapleson, *Memoirs*, 93.

⁸⁵ Ringel, 214.

⁸⁶ Gye, 19 May 1854.

intolerable *amour propre*... This man wants to be the incarnation of Covent Garden and for no one else to appear in the management of it – and the tyranny he would exercise would be fearful. He told me I was a great deal too much at the theatre!!!!!! However I must for the present put up with all this, smile, be courteous – what a dose!⁸⁷

Although Gye resented Costa's 'wretched temper and arrogance', he recognised that he needed to 'smooth' him.⁸⁸ Dideriksen writes that there was a 'distinct possibility' of Costa's appointment being terminated in 1855.⁸⁹ But the clear thrust of Gye's Diary is that, until the late 1860s, he saw an overriding need to retain Costa because, in the absence of any comparable replacement, he could not afford to see him desert to the rival company. When Costa was absent from the theatre without notice in 1865, Gye wrote 'I had a great mind to have a row with him but thought it more prudent not'.⁹⁰ On another occasion, 'He was rather inclined to be nasty but I would not quarrel'.⁹¹

Costa's contracts, which gave him authority over the *mise-en-scène*, raised issues of demarcation that were harder to resolve as the management of the house became more specialised. In 1852 Gye took on an experienced stage manager, Augustus Harris, who increasingly acted for him as a fixer and recruiter on the Continent – tasks that Costa had declined. As Harris became de facto deputy manager, it was inevitable that he would come into conflict with Costa, who accused him of being Gye's spy and of extorting money from the singers in exchange for their engagements.⁹² Gye described a blazing row in which Costa 'complained of Harris, Beverley [the scenic artist] simply

⁸⁷ Gye, 16 Nov. 1854.

⁸⁸ Gye, 16 May 1865.

⁸⁹ Dideriksen, 213.

⁹⁰ Gye, 18 April 1865.

⁹¹ Gye, 3 May 1864.

⁹² Gye, 22 June 1858 and 18 May 1863.

because they did not bow to the ground to him and be entirely his servants.!!!’⁹³

Mapleson claimed that Costa extended this vendetta to Harris’s son.⁹⁴

7.3 The Split



Figs 7.6/7 The rival attractions of the 1850s at Covent Garden (Adelina Patti) and Her Majesty’s (Therèse Tietjens).

Gye’s financial position appears to have worsened during the 1860s. The cost of rebuilding Covent Garden raised his debts to £145,000 in 1860, forcing him to borrow at high interest rates, which kept him ‘in constant anxiety and hot water’.⁹⁵ After a profitable but brief monopoly in 1861 and the Great Exhibition season of 1862, he was hit by the decline in foreign visitors (especially during the American Civil War) and the costs of his continuing lawsuits (particularly with his ex-partner Knox). He faced growing competition from Mapleson at Her Majesty’s and low-price opera at Drury

⁹³ Gye, 16 Nov. 1854.

⁹⁴ Mapleson, *Memoirs*, 306.

⁹⁵ Gye, 2 Aug. 1861.

Lane. He lost important sources of income when his main autumn tenant, the English Opera Association, collapsed in 1866 and the Floral Hall concerts made a loss in 1866-7.

The running costs of Covent Garden escalated in the 1860s. To perform his grand opera repertoire, he had to engage more solo singers: 23 a year before 1856, but 28 in 1861-7. His outgoings, which averaged 82% of receipts in 1861, rose to 94% in 1867. With rent and other overheads, this left him unable to repay his debts. He desperately sought ways of reducing his biggest expense – that of the leading singers. He put on second team singers in *I Puritani* and, when Costa objected, told him that he ‘could no longer pay for perfection as the public would not pay for it’.⁹⁶ He even considered in 1863 taking over the *Théâtre-Italien* in Paris to secure a monopoly of the singers’ services, but concluded that he was too independent to ‘bow and scrape to Ministers’.⁹⁷ In 1865 he seriously considered selling his Covent Garden investment, admitting in his diary that he did not care whether he remained as manager afterwards.⁹⁸ In 1867, he overdrew his account – ‘a thing I never did before’.⁹⁹

In a renewed effort to take control over the orchestra’s contracts, Gye tried to negotiate directly with their leader. He described exultantly in his diary that he had settled the orchestra’s contracts before finalising Costa’s.¹⁰⁰ But this coup failed: 69 players

⁹⁶ Gye, 6 April 1868.

⁹⁷ Gye, 9 Feb. 1863.

⁹⁸ Gye, 14 July 1865.

⁹⁹ Gye, 5 Aug. 1867. Details in Ringel, 185-6.

¹⁰⁰ Gye, 28 July 1867.

petitioned Costa to get Gye to accept ‘our fair and full claims’.¹⁰¹ Gye was reduced to pleading with Costa to scale the chorus back to 80.¹⁰²

These inevitable problems over costs and contracts were manageable while both men felt the necessity to manage them, as was the case until the late 1860s. But the balance of power was shifting in ways that changed the chemistry of their relations. By the 1860s, Gye was the dominant manager in London. He no longer needed Costa as a link to the Queen, who had ceased to attend the opera after 1861. He had moreover developed his own close relationship with the operaphile Prince of Wales, for whose mistress Pauline Lucca he occasionally rescheduled the programme.¹⁰³

A note of tetchiness – never far from Gye’s pen – crept more frequently into his entries about Costa, revealing that minor issues were becoming harder to manage. As they approached their sixties both men, under acute but different strains, were less ready to make allowances for the other. It was then that the lack of personal warmth between them began to tell. In 1865, when Costa refused to audition the tenor Hilaire because Gye had not asked him in person, Gye commented: ‘The man’s arrogance is beyond all belief and I would have given him a devil of a blowing up, but such pride is too pitiable’.¹⁰⁴ A month later, Gye recorded bitterly that Costa had not sent him a ticket for the first night of his Oratorio *Naaman*, ‘although I am constantly giving him opera boxes besides the one I give him for the season’.¹⁰⁵ Several pages of Gye’s Diary are taken up with a quarrel over whether Costa needed to ask Gye for permission for Patti

¹⁰¹ Memorandum of 8 Jan. 1867 in the ROHC.

¹⁰² ROHC, Gye-Costa corr. (31 Jan. 1867).

¹⁰³ Gye, 14 June 1867.

¹⁰⁴ Gye, 31 March and 6 April 1865.

¹⁰⁵ Gye, 12 May 1865.

to sing at the 1864 Birmingham Festival. Gye said that ‘as a matter of business I did not wish her to sing there, but as it was for him she might go with pleasure’. But Costa’s ‘absurd pride’ prevented him from asking. Gye commented: ‘He likes me to ask favours of him’ and later complained that Costa had not even thanked him.¹⁰⁶

It was a sign that relations were deteriorating that Gye increasingly recorded stories to Costa’s discredit (as indeed he did about other musicians). The soprano Marguerite Artot ‘innocently committed the enormous indiscretion of telling Costa the other day that the chorus did not sing in tune with her!!! She little knew the tender ground she was treading on; it has doubtless made the gentleman her enemy for life’.¹⁰⁷ When Costa complained about the soprano Fioretti, Gye heard from Harris that ‘she had written something to Graziani which had offended Costa’s pride’.¹⁰⁸ When Costa tried to replace Hermione Rudersdorf in the part of Donna Elvira, ‘I found out that he had had some row with Rudersdorf at Exeter Hall about his Oratorio’.¹⁰⁹

Gye’s many anxieties aggravated his health and morale. A long-standing sufferer from the ‘brown ague’, he began in the late 1860s to complain of fatigue. According to Mapleson, he was physically unwell and in a state of nervous irritability. He had always shown a misanthropic strain. He was not on speaking terms with his own father, who tried repeatedly to dun him for money. Although capable of charm, he regarded nearly everyone in the opera business with suspicion or contempt. His feud with Colonel Knox went through the Chancery Division to the Lords, leaving a bitterness so deep that Knox sought to harm Gye by investing in Mapleson’s company. Gye saw his partner Mitchell

¹⁰⁶ Gye, 13-24 May 1865.

¹⁰⁷ Gye, 28 June 1864.

¹⁰⁸ Gye, 10 May 1865.

¹⁰⁹ Gye, 25 May 1865.

as ‘perfidious’, Lumley ‘the most dreadful rascal’, Jarrett ‘a traitor’, Beale ‘a very undecided slippery chap’, Mapleson ‘untrustworthy’, Meyerbeer ‘an intriguer’, Cruvelli and her brother ‘cormorants’, Tagliafico a ‘devil’ and Grisi and Mario ‘mean-spirited wretches’. He even suspected his favourite Patti of being ‘up to some tricks’.

Increasingly intolerant of criticism, Gye began in 1869 to keep a press cuttings scrapbook in which he annotated objectionable reviews.¹¹⁰

As Gye found it harder to handle his autocratic and inflexible conductor, the central issues of finance and authority became more neuralgic. Thanks mainly to Gye’s tact, 1866 had ended on a friendly note. Costa finalised the orchestral engagements at his house after persuading the players that Gye could not afford to reinstate the one-eighth salary they were demanding. During Christmas week, Gye allayed Costa’s suspicions about Augustus Harris and his fear that Gye planned to open the house five nights every week. ‘He had evidently conjured up all sorts of things in his mind in consequence of Bottesini’s engagement, who he said was a great blackguard... We however parted very good friends when I had reassured him’.¹¹¹ They compared notes about the Paris premiere of Gounod’s *Roméo et Juliette*, the Royal Command performance during the visit of the Turkish Sultan in July and the Queen’s State Concert. Having found a new *modus vivendi*, Costa largely disappeared from Gye’s diary and concentrated on the 15 operas in the 1867 prospectus, including premieres of *Don Carlos* and *Roméo et Juliette*. They agreed a contract for 1868 on the usual terms. But on 7 December 1867, the situation shifted dramatically when a fire at Her Majesty’s destroyed much of Mapleson’s uninsured properties.

¹¹⁰ Gye, 1869-73, ROHC.

¹¹¹ Gye, 22 Dec. 1866.

Mapleson had been a formidable rival, Gye's equal in tenacity and guile. His musical credentials were stronger, since he had been a violinist at Her Majesty's, a music critic and even a singer. Despite his shaky finances, he had become a serious competitor, relying mainly on Italian operas, which required a smaller cast and thinner orchestra.¹¹² But by 1867

Mapleson's position was even more precarious than Gye's and there were rumours that he would barely survive the

season.¹¹³ In June he proposed, through an intermediary, a pact not to poach each other's singers and to pay them only 'curtain salaries'. Gye replied that he could not rely on Mapleson's word but would not object to taking Her Majesty's off his hands and leaving provincial tours to him.¹¹⁴

Gye's first reaction to the fire at Her Majesty's was to try to book Drury Lane in order to deny Mapleson an alternative theatre, but Mapleson beat him to it by one hour. Gye's readiness to pay £4,000 simply to frustrate Mapleson showed how anxious he was to end their ruinous competition. A third-party proposal to revert to a single Italian opera company brought them face to face for the first time in February 1868.¹¹⁵ Gye

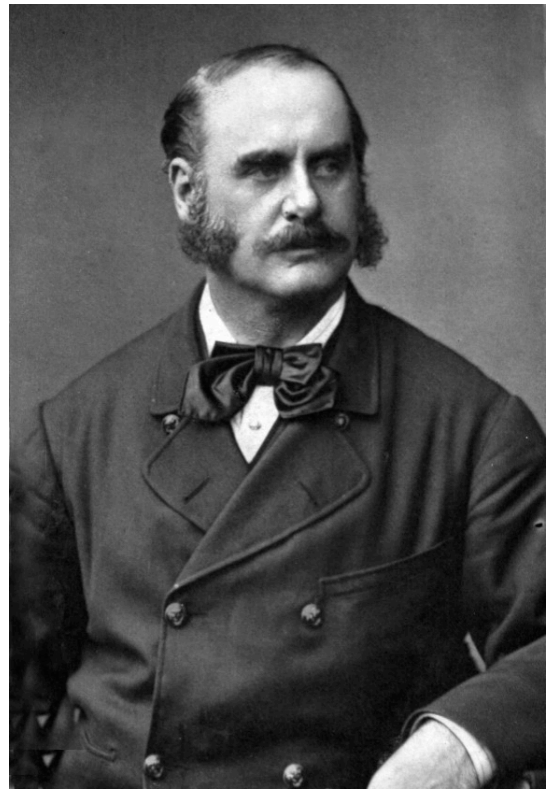


Fig. 7.8 James Henry 'Colonel' Mapleson, Gye's most formidable rival manager.

¹¹² Ringel, 116.

¹¹³ Gye, 6 and 21 May 1867.

¹¹⁴ Gye, 24 June 1867.

¹¹⁵ 31 March 1868. The negotiations for Gye and Mapleson to be bought out by a consortium led by a financier called Wagstaff are fully described in Ringel, 227-232.

commented that Mapleson 'seems a good natured but a wild harem scarem fellow and I fear...that his word is not in the least to be depended on'.¹¹⁶ He calculated that an Italian opera monopoly would yield a gross profit of about £20,000, and was therefore disappointed when this project petered out, commenting: 'I had thought I had got rid of the dreadful business of Opera management'.¹¹⁷



Fig. 7.9 Caricature of the Gye and Mapleson companies. *The Mask* (Aug.1868). Gye conducting and Costa at right.

Gye's finances deteriorated further in 1868.¹¹⁸ With no more surety to offer the bank, he could not pay Costa and the singers, and feared that one of them might start bankruptcy proceedings against him.¹¹⁹ He again pressed Costa to reduce the expenses of the orchestra, which had risen from 12% of the budget in 1861-7 to 15% in 1868.¹²⁰ Costa

¹¹⁶ Gye, 6 Feb. 1868.

¹¹⁷ Gye, 1 Feb. and 31 March 1868.

¹¹⁸ Ringel, 234

¹¹⁹ Gye, 28 May, 11 June, 25 June 1868. Details from Ringel.

¹²⁰ Ringel, 241.

‘allowed that the singers were too highly paid, but the moment I talked upon the orchestra, he as usual opposed any reduction’. Gye warned him again that ‘things could not go on as they are’.¹²¹

The worsening of Gye’s finances during 1868 helped to overcome his antipathy to working with Mapleson, whose new venture at Drury Lane was beginning to attract more favourable reviews. In late June 1868, he ‘felt very unwell and remained at home – I wrote to Mapleson about joining the two operas’.¹²² They exchanged private addresses and began to meet secretly at Gye’s house in Wandsworth. Gye remained suspicious of Mapleson who, according to Harris, was still trying to lure Costa.¹²³ But merger offered him the chance to neutralise the threat from Mapleson, tame the singers and musicians, and restore his bank credit with Coutts. Desperation rather than policy drove both parties to sign a confidential agreement on 11 August 1868 for a three-year partnership from 1869. Only one house, in practice Covent Garden, would perform Italian Opera, under the management of Mapleson.

With Mapleson signed up as a partner, Gye was for the first time in a buyer’s market for musicians. This prospect seems to have triggered a change in his behaviour. For thirty years, he had gone to enormous lengths to humour his artistes, putting up with their tantrums, fake illnesses and exorbitant demands, and even – in the case of Mario and Grisi – paying their taxes. He took advantage of his agreement with Mapleson to offer Mario a shorter contract at a lower salary. Mario left the company, commenting that, after all his sacrifices, it was unworthy to bargain over the last notes of a singer’s career.

¹²¹ Gye, 8 July 1868.

¹²² Gye, 19 June 1868.

¹²³ Gye, 3 Aug. 1868.

The alliance with Mapleson marked a decisive shift in the balance of power between Gye and Costa. Gye no longer feared losing Costa to a rival house and now had access, through Mapleson, to another conductor. Luigi Arditi, although not in the same league as Costa, was competent and pliable (Fig. 7.8). Gye needed anyway to cover his options against rumours that Costa might take on the Paris Opera or retire altogether. In July



Fig. 7.10 Luigi Arditi (1822-1903) Costa's temporary successor.

1868, he sounded out Patti's brother-in-law

Strakosch, who recommended Polidari, the director at Turin, and Vianesi, who had conducted at Drury Lane.¹²⁴

There is conflicting evidence about whether Gye wanted to retain Costa in the new circumstances. Mapleson maintained that Gye was 'most anxious to be rid alike of his services and of his tyranny'.¹²⁵ Ringel and Dideriksen state that Gye 'frequently considered releasing Costa'.¹²⁶ Gruneisen stated afterwards that there had been no prospect of Costa staying since it was 'known full well that Mr Costa would never consent to...not having the proper rehearsals and the control of the executants'.¹²⁷ On the other hand, Gruneisen had earlier implied that Costa might stay: 'if Costa and Arditi

¹²⁴ Gye, 29 July 1868.

¹²⁵ Mapleson, *Memoirs*. 82.

¹²⁶ Ringel and Dideriksen, 23.

¹²⁷ *London Standard* (25 Feb. 1868).

will consent to work together, they are to be alternate conductors'.¹²⁸ Moreover Gye's diary suggests that he went to some lengths to retain Costa's services, which he knew would give him a stronger team. Costa was the first person to be told in confidence of the agreement with Mapleson.¹²⁹ Gye devoted much care to his negotiations with Costa, despite many other worries: his father died that month and Gye was complaining of chest pains. He took a whole day over drafting the key letter explaining his proposals to Costa, assuring him 'I will do all in my power to render your position as agreeable to you as possible and I trust that the 20 years we have been together may receive an addition of many more'.¹³⁰

It is fair to conclude that Gye wanted to keep Costa – but on his own terms. He did not budge on the two central changes that he had agreed with Mapleson: there would be two conductors and the impresarios would have the final word in the management of the musicians. Gye may well have suspected that Costa would not accept these terms, which Gruneisen claimed would reduce his position to that of 'a call-boy'.¹³¹ Whatever his aim, Gye handled the exchanges adroitly, with an eye to not putting himself in the wrong with Costa's many admirers, including the royal family. He was thus able later to claim that 'notwithstanding the awful life he has led me for some years, I did all I could to enlist his services for the coming season'.¹³²

Costa seems not to have grasped that a fundamental change had occurred. He did not comment on Gye's proposals, but simply stamped his old contract and sent it back for

¹²⁸ Announcement in *The Queen*, cited by Santley, *Student and Singer*, 271.

¹²⁹ Gye, 9 Jan. 1869.

¹³⁰ ROHC, Gye-Costa corr. (14 Jan. 1869).

¹³¹ Gruneisen, *Opera and the Press*, 44.

¹³² Gruneisen, *Opera and the Press*, 53.

signature in the usual way. The details of their exchanges over the next three weeks are summarised in Appendix A. Gye conceded several minor changes in the new contract, and agreed to preserve Costa's salary. He assured Costa that his 'recommendations' would be taken seriously. But he stood firm on 'the principles I have laid down'. The tone had changed: Gye was now in a position to demand total authority over the musicians. To Mario as well as Costa, he pretended that his hands were tied by his deal with Mapleson. But it looks as though Mapleson was telling the truth when he wrote that Gye was the prime mover. Gye was determined not to lose this chance to restore his finances by establishing an Italian Opera monopoly under firm managerial control.

Costa, at the age of 59, was not prepared to yield the powers he had accumulated over forty years. His reputation was high. He had, belatedly, been elected to the Athenaeum Club and rumours of a knighthood were in the air. He knew that, as Mapleson observed, Gye was afraid of his 'mere force of will'. The simplest explanation for the break was that there was not room in the same company for two ageing autocrats. For Gye, Costa had changed from being a crucial solution to his problems to someone whose existing contract was an obstacle to his financial salvation. For Costa, the central issue was the one that had governed his whole career: the need for total control over the resources necessary for disciplined performances. As he wrote to Gye:

The Director of the Music, the Conductor and the Superintendent of the *mise-en-scène* is clearly responsible for the efficiency of the performances, and...it is out of all reason that he should be interfered with or subject to the control of others in the exercise of his functions.¹³³

As the dispute moved to the press, Costa clarified that he had not resigned but had refused an engagement that 'sought to deprive me of the independent control which I have so long exercised in the selection and direction of the chorus and orchestra'. Gye

¹³³ ROHC, Costa-Gye corr. (27 Jan. 1869).

continued his correspondence with Costa until 18 February. Meanwhile he offered Li Calsi the role of stand-in conductor at the derisory salary of £42 a month, but ‘he was evidently afraid of Costa’.¹³⁴ Gruneisen set out Costa’s side of the story in an article in the *Standard*, which Gye described as ‘shameful’.¹³⁵ On 22 February, Gye and Mapleson made the decisive move of engaging Vianesi and Arditì.¹³⁶

Costa went on writing letters – punctiliously sending ‘compliments to Mrs Gye’ – even after Arditì had opened the new season.¹³⁷ But Gye was not open to further discussion. Did Costa resign (as Gruneisen claimed) or was he dismissed (as recent scholars have argued)?¹³⁸ Neither seems to have been the case. Costa wrote to the *Daily News* on 20 February clarifying that he had not resigned but had been unable to accept the change of regime proposed by Gye. Costa had made clear to Gye on 27 January that he would not renew his engagement if Gye insisted on his new terms.¹³⁹ Gye in turn told Costa on 2 February that he would offer no further concessions. On the following day, Costa stated that, unless Gye confirmed his contract in its traditional form by 5 February, he would consider himself free of all obligations. Gye did not do so, but sent a further proposal three days after that deadline.¹⁴⁰ It is fair to conclude that they had reached an impasse in which Costa’s position as conductor could not continue.

¹³⁴ Gye, 9 Feb. 1869.

¹³⁵ Gye, 25 Feb. 1869.

¹³⁶ Gye, 22 Feb. 1869.

¹³⁷ Gye, 11 April 1869.

¹³⁸ Ringel, 241. Cowgill and Dideriksen state that Gye ‘sacked Costa’. ‘Opera orchestras in Georgian and early Victorian London’, 273.

¹³⁹ ROHC, Costa-Gye corr. (27 Jan. 1869).

¹⁴⁰ Gye, 8 Feb. 1869.

Gye broke with Costa on a confrontational note, demanding the return of the orchestral contracts that Costa had kept at his residence and sending a characteristically barbed letter asking whether Costa had really removed all his cuts from the score of *Dinorah* before handing it to Arditi.¹⁴¹ The latter illustrated the dispute between them about who ‘owned’ the musical side of the venture – an issue that Costa could never expect to win. Given the commercial pressures on the opera house, it was inevitable that, when Costa’s imperatives (efficiency, preparation, professionalism) came into stark conflict with Gye’s (economic viability and control of expenditure), the latter would prevail.

Their breach was final. It is a sign of the bad blood between them that Gye recorded avidly in his diary any points to Costa’s discredit. He grumbled that the Librarian, Horton, had been enticed away by ‘that rascal Costa’.¹⁴² He was pleased that the opening of the Albert Hall in 1871, under Costa’s baton, had gone ‘very smoothly but lamely...The Queen had but a cool reception and Costa’s new cantata got scarcely a hand’.¹⁴³ He worked hard to spread his version of their break-up. He circulated a folder of ‘the Costa correspondence’ and took a copy to the Prince of Wales to explain his side of the story.¹⁴⁴ He mischievously alleged that Gruneisen had ‘over and over again spoken to me of [Costa’s] arrogance, his avarice and his overbearing conduct [and]... often expressed to me your astonishment that I could have borne it all so long’.¹⁴⁵ Gye’s campaign to influence the press achieved some success. When he died in 1878, his obituary attributed Covent Garden’s success solely to Gye and implied that he had got

141 ROHC, Gye-Costa corr. (5 and 15 April 1869).

142 Gye, 25 Feb. 1871.

143 Gye, 29 March 1871.

144 Gye, 22 June 1869.

145 Gye-Gruneisen (21 March 1869), Gruneisen, *Opera and the Press*, 50.

rid of Costa for trying to impose a regime ‘incompatible with [Gye’s] dignity as a manager’.¹⁴⁶

Costa enjoyed a more immediate and public revenge. His next public appearance, at an SHS concert, was greeted with loud acclamations. The *ILN* commented that it was ‘gratifying to see such high desert, professional and personal, so honoured’.¹⁴⁷ There were many press articles crediting him with having built Covent Garden’s reputation and accusing Gye of squandering Costa’s achievements there. The *Orchestra* chided Gye for ‘operatic monopoly...heedlessness as to ensemble, carelessness as to art and ingratitude towards Sir Michael Costa’.¹⁴⁸ Costa’s knighthood in April 1869 particularly riled Gye, an entrepreneur on the fringe of social respectability. He later commented bitterly to the Prince of Wales’s Secretary that the Queen clearly did not know how much money he had lost by catering to her wishes ‘or else I felt that the Queen would not have made Costa and Benedict Knights & have passed me over, who had done more for the Lyric Drama in England than any other man’.¹⁴⁹

Unlike Lumley in 1846, Gye did not face a mass-exodus of musicians. Arditi acknowledged that there was ‘much discontent and irritation’ among the players, who maintained a dogged silence’ on his opening night.¹⁵⁰ But most stayed on, though the leader (Sainton), chorus-master (Smythson) and four other leading players resigned.¹⁵¹ Over the next three years, Gye employed four Italian conductors. Luigi Arditi was, in

¹⁴⁶ *London Standard* obituary (5 Dec. 1878).

¹⁴⁷ *ILN* (24 April 1869), 422.

¹⁴⁸ *The Orchestra* (30 July 1869).

¹⁴⁹ Gye, 30 May 1871.

¹⁵⁰ Arditi, *Reminiscences*, 181.

¹⁵¹ *Times* (23 March 1869).

Mapleson's words, 'musicianly and skilful', but he stayed for only one season, since he – like Costa – refused to share the podium.¹⁵² Li Calsi was dismissed by Davison as 'comparatively incapable'.¹⁵³ Under Auguste Vianesi, who was paid £100 a month compared with Costa's £500, the band was 'rough and inartistic'. Enrico Bevignani, who took over as *maestro al piano*, was a 'non-entity' and his performances 'intolerably coarse'.¹⁵⁴

Gye and Mapleson believed that having two conductors would allow them to open for five or six night a week and to mount more productions more quickly. But it also brought its own disadvantages. The *Athenaeum* pronounced the experiment an 'utter failure': it was 'absurd to believe that the musical organisation, discipline and efficiency of an opera, the work of 22 years, could be transferred from the hands of a thorough disciplinarian, a consummate musician and an incomparable conductor to the rule of two professors with divided authority'. With too little time for rehearsal, 'haste, hurry and flurry' were 'the disorder of the day and inefficiency of the night'.¹⁵⁵ Without Costa's iron control, it proved hard to merge the two theatres' musicians and singers in a single company. Christine Nilsson declined to sign up and Patti refused to sing under Li Calsi, who was confined to operas 'which present less difficulty in direction'.¹⁵⁶ There were 21 changes of programme out of 80 performances, which the *Athenaeum* contrasted with the punctuality of the Costa regime.¹⁵⁷ The musical side was sufficiently

¹⁵² Gye, 6 July 1869. Ardit, *Reminiscences*, 76 and 186.

¹⁵³ *Times* (5 April 1969).

¹⁵⁴ *Shaw's Music*, vol. 2, 160, 137, 115 and 118.

¹⁵⁵ *Athenaeum*, (23 July 1870), 123 and (6 Aug. 1870), 185.

¹⁵⁶ *ILN* (17 April 1869), 398. Gye, 19 July 1869.

¹⁵⁷ Ringel, 249. *Athenaeum* (1 May 1869), 613.

fragile for the bookseller Mitchell to suggest to Gye at the end of the first season that Costa should be invited back. But Gye would not consider it.¹⁵⁸

Gye was correct in his belief that he could now impose his will on the musicians. In March, the chorus signed a new agreement, surrendering their right to payment for Mondays or Fridays. 'I altered the terms, making them the same as they were some years ago in the engagement which the chorus broke and refused to fulfil, chiefly as I have always believed through Costa's influence.'¹⁵⁹ Gye saved £1,000 in orchestral costs and, more important to him, made sure that he always had first call on the players. Although artistically undistinguished, Gye and Mapleson's first monopoly season netted a profit of about £29,000.¹⁶⁰ They sought to consolidate their monopoly by bringing in another manager, George Wood, who was planning a rival season. But the cartel collapsed when the agent Henry Jarrett signed up several of the key singers for a season at Drury Lane. In 1870, Wood/Jarrett with Arditì at Drury Lane scored better reviews than Gye/Mapleson with Vianesi and Bevignani, but neither company made a profit.¹⁶¹

The merger agreement had provided that Gye would 'take no part in the management unless he wished to do so'. But, as Mapleson observed drily, 'the wish came upon him after about a fortnight'. Even during their first season, Gye was describing Mapleson in his diary as a liar and asking 'What dodge is he now up to?' Mapleson for his part suspected that Gye was trying to trap him into a joint venture at Her Majesty's, which Gye would paralyse, leaving himself with a monopoly at Covent Garden. After numerous solicitors' letters, Gye finished up in sole control of both theatres. As their

¹⁵⁸ Gye, 28 July 1869.

¹⁵⁹ Gye, 8 March 1869.

¹⁶⁰ Gye, 15 July 1869.

¹⁶¹ *Athenaeum* (12 Nov. 1870), 633.

partnership broke up, a year earlier than envisaged, Mapleson moved with characteristic speed. 'I returned to my old quarters at Drury Lane, my first act being to secure the services of Sir Michael Costa'.¹⁶² The *Times* congratulated him on securing 'the man who by universal consent is the greatest in Europe'.¹⁶³

7.4 Costa-Mapleson Partnership: 1871-9

Costa's nine-year collaboration with Mapleson at Drury Lane and later Her Majesty's was the smoothest of his career. Mapleson was a fellow mason, more musical and easy-going than Gye. He put up with Costa's 'despotic' nature because he valued the discipline that he brought to the house and the 14 players (including Sainton) whom Costa attracted from Covent Garden to form what the *Athenaeum* considered his best orchestra.¹⁶⁴ Costa's musicians were frequently credited with redeeming mediocre performances.¹⁶⁵ But Costa remained an exigent partner: the pianist Eugenio di Pirani described how Costa, at the request of the German Empress, forced Mapleson to hire him by threatening to resign.¹⁶⁶

Gye used his unchallenged authority to adopt a new programming policy, based on a handful of stars (Patti, Albani and later the baritone Victor Maurel) and a greatly increased number of performances. Unlike Costa, conductors like Vianesi and Bevignani could be brow-beaten to perform five or six times a week, to suit the needs of Gye's timetable rather than the exigencies of rehearsal.¹⁶⁷ Their tone towards Gye was

¹⁶² Mapleson, *Memoirs*, 82 and 86.

¹⁶³ *Times* (17 April 1871).

¹⁶⁴ *Athenaeum* (22 April 1871), 503 and (29 April 1871), 533.

¹⁶⁵ For example *Athenaeum* (15 July 1871), 88 and (28 June 1879), 833.

¹⁶⁶ *Etude Magazine* (Jan. 1915), <http://scriabin.com/etude/1915/01/well-known-composers-of-to-day-eugenio-di-pirani.html>.

¹⁶⁷ *Athenaeum* (18 March 1871), 343. On too frequent performances, see also *ILN* (27 July 1872), 94. On the deficiencies of Vianesi and Bevignani and divided control, *Athenaeum* (18 March 1871), 343 and (29 July 1871), 152.

notably more deferential than Costa's.¹⁶⁸ In 1874, Gye put on 81 performances of 31 operas, compared with Mapleson's 19. The *Graphic* commented that the Covent Garden orchestra had lost the esprit de corps for which it had been distinguished under Costa and were 'hopelessly demoralised' by the dual conductorship of Vianesi and Bevignani'.¹⁶⁹ The *Athenaeum* objected to Gye advertising his band as being that of the Royal Italian Opera: 'since Costa's secession, deterioration has been the order or disorder of the day'.¹⁷⁰

It was a period marked by artistic inertia for both theatres – what Henry Davison described as 'five years perhaps unmatched for dullness in London's operatic annals'.¹⁷¹ In 1871, Drury Lane was generally judged the stronger when the two houses competed in *Robert le diable*, *Fidelio* and *Les Huguenots*.¹⁷² In 1875, Costa/Mapleson scored over Covent Garden in *Semiramide*, *Fidelio* and *Lohengrin*.¹⁷³ In 1879, Mapleson's version of *Aida* eclipsed Gye's, in particular because of the 'highly effective choral singing and...magnificent orchestral execution'. 'Mapleson had a material advantage in the aid of Sir Michael Costa who, besides having the finest orchestra in London...always took special care that proper preparation had been secured before the nights of performance.'¹⁷⁴ Shaw agreed, describing Costa's orchestra as 'excellent' and Vianesi's

168 Vianesi-Gye (1 Dec. 1875), RAM 2007.928.

169 *Graphic* (127 July 1872).

170 *Athenaeum* (12 Nov. 1870), 633.

171 Davison, *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*, 291.

172 *Athenaeum* (13 May 1871), 599; and (20 May 1871), 630.

173 Klein, *Thirty Years*, 47.

174 *Athenaeum* (28 June 1879), 833.

as playing ‘in a style more suited to a circus or a dancing saloon than to an opera house.’¹⁷⁵

While Gye claimed to make a profit of £15,000 a year in the period up his retirement in 1877, Mapleson invested disastrously in the abortive construction of a National Opera House at Millbank (Fig. 7.11). Money was the trigger of his split with Costa, who had agreed to join him at a lower salary of £1,500, but refused to sign up for 1880 unless he received back-payments that were overdue. Mapleson tried to avert a court case, but was briefly declared bankrupt. He took on Arditì, who later observed: ‘*Entre nous*, I believe he was also becoming a little tired of Sir Michael, whose invaluable services were somewhat obscured by his autocratic ways...’¹⁷⁶

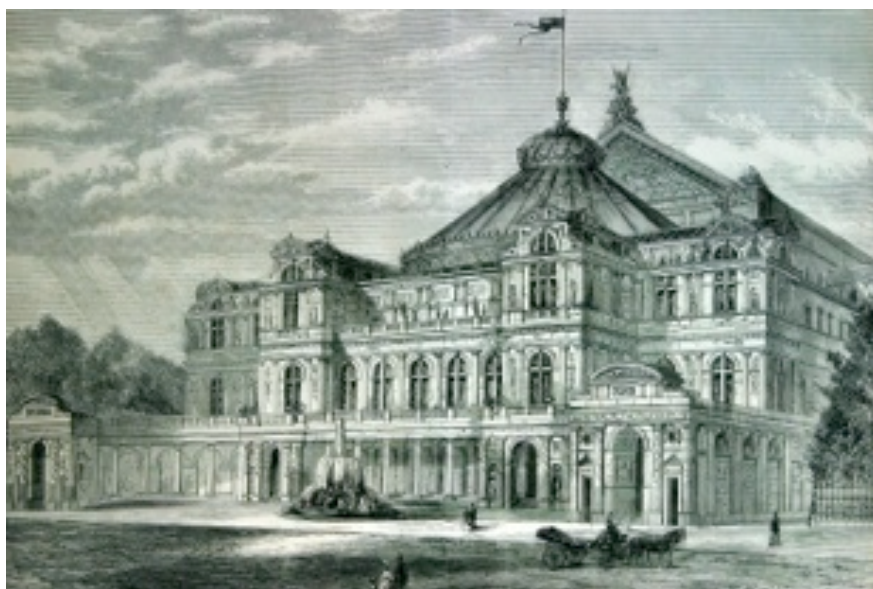


Fig. 7.11 Mapleson’s planned National Opera House at Millbank (1875).

By the early 1870s, Costa had been the leading operatic conductor in England for four decades. He faced no challenge on his home ground. But there was growing competition

¹⁷⁵ Shaw’s *Music*, vol. 1, 137 and 1 160. See also 159-165 for a comparison of their 1877 seasons and 141 on their respective productions of *Der fliegende Holländer*.

¹⁷⁶ Arditì, *Reminiscences*, 234.

in the other three main spheres of his career: concerts, the oratorios and the festivals.

These fields are the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 8: The Concert and Oratorio Scene

Although at first he needed to focus on his operatic conducting, Costa was increasingly drawn into London's burgeoning concert scene. By the middle of the century, in addition to averaging 69 opera nights a year, he was conducting about 10 opera and private concerts, 8 Philharmonic concerts and 30 oratorio performances and festival appearances.

8.1 Concert Life in London

Concert life expanded in early nineteenth-century London more rapidly than the theatre and the opera, helped by the fact that it was less regulated and, from 1837, less heavily taxed. Concerts attracted a growing audience partly because they involved less interaction between participants than other forms of social behaviour and were thus more penetrable. In 1826/7 London, with more than twice the population of Paris and four times that of Vienna, was supporting 125 concerts, compared with 78 in Paris and 111 in Vienna.¹ Fétis estimated in 1829 that there were 3 or 4 concerts a day in the season.² Concerts were initially concentrated in the Easter-to-August season but gradually expanded to become a year-round phenomenon.³ In 1863, the *Times* claimed that there were about 500 concerts a year.⁴

As the audience expanded, a wider variety of concert models emerged, attracting support from a more heterogeneous social base.⁵ Virtuoso 'recitals' enjoyed a vogue

1 William Weber, *Music and the Middle Class*, Tables 1-4. By 1845/6 Paris had caught up (383 concerts against London's 381).

2 Fétis, 'On the State of Music in London', *Harmonicon*, vol. VII, no. 11 (1829), 278-9.

3 *Morning Chronicle* (26 Dec. 1845).

4 *Times* (4 July 1863).

5 Pierre Bourdieu, cited in Weber, 'The Great Transformation', 91.

from the 1830s; chamber concerts started in 1835; promenade concerts in 1838. Lenten oratorios broadened out to include secular works: a typical Lenten concert in 1832 combined choral works with arias by Rossini, Bellini, Weber and Carafa.⁶ The greatest expansion was in benefit concerts, of which there were 15 in 1795; 30 in 1825; and 42 in 1828.⁷ There was also a resurgence of private salon concerts, in reaction to the socially mixed benefit and promenade concerts.

Because there were no permanent orchestras outside the Opera, sponsors of concerts had to recruit scratch orchestras and put them on with a minimum of rehearsal. Except for a small number of high-earning virtuosi – Paganini, Liszt, Thalberg – most concert organisers worked to small profit margins and had to offer *pot pourri* programmes to attract a large attendance. A wide menu was one feature of the *concert monstre* developed in Paris by Musard and in Vienna by Strauss, which Jullien extended successfully to London from 1840 (Chapter 3). But benefit concerts also had to offer a broad programme. The pianist Julius Benedict's annual benefit offered 40 varied pieces and ran for 3-4 hours.⁸ Costa conducted several of the main annual benefit concerts – organised by Benedict, Lucy Anderson and Edward Eliaison – which called on the services of his opera house players. Initially he 'conducted' at the piano in a subordinate position. He also appeared in joint programmes at the opera house with Paganini (as accompanist), Liszt (as extra pianist) and Chélaré (as co-conductor). From the late 1830s, he switched to the opera concerts. These activities gave him early exposure beyond the opera house and led to him taking on the leading role as organiser of private aristocratic concerts.

⁶ Bowley *The Sacred Harmonic Society*, 6.

⁷ There is a good analysis of the benefit concert phenomenon in McVeigh, 'Benefit Concerts in 19th Century London'. On Lenten Concerts, Howard Smither, *The Oratorio in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century* (University of North Carolina: 2000), 281.

⁸ *Times* (27 June 1848).

8.2 Private aristocratic Concerts

As conductor of the Italian Opera and a member of the Old Guard, Costa was well

placed to organise the private

concerts that became, in Victoria's

early years, a prominent part of the

London season (Fig. 8.1). Costa

conducted, directed or 'presided at

the pianoforte' at more than eighty

concerts at Kensington Palace,

Buckingham Palace and other

aristocratic residences between 1835

and 1860 (author's data). They were

made up largely of contemporary

arias by foreign stars from the opera

houses. Costa acted as both

impresario and accompanist for these

concerts, drawing up the cast and

programme in consultation with the patron. His role as gate-keeper gave him

considerable leverage over the opera stars, for whom aristocratic concerts were

prestigious as well as lucrative. Their scramble to get away from the opera in time to

attend these concerts was 'the curse of the Italian manager'.⁹

Costa first appears in Princess Victoria's diary in 1835, at her 16th birthday concert at

Kensington Palace; Rubini, Tamburini, Lablache and Ivanoff sang her favourite arias,

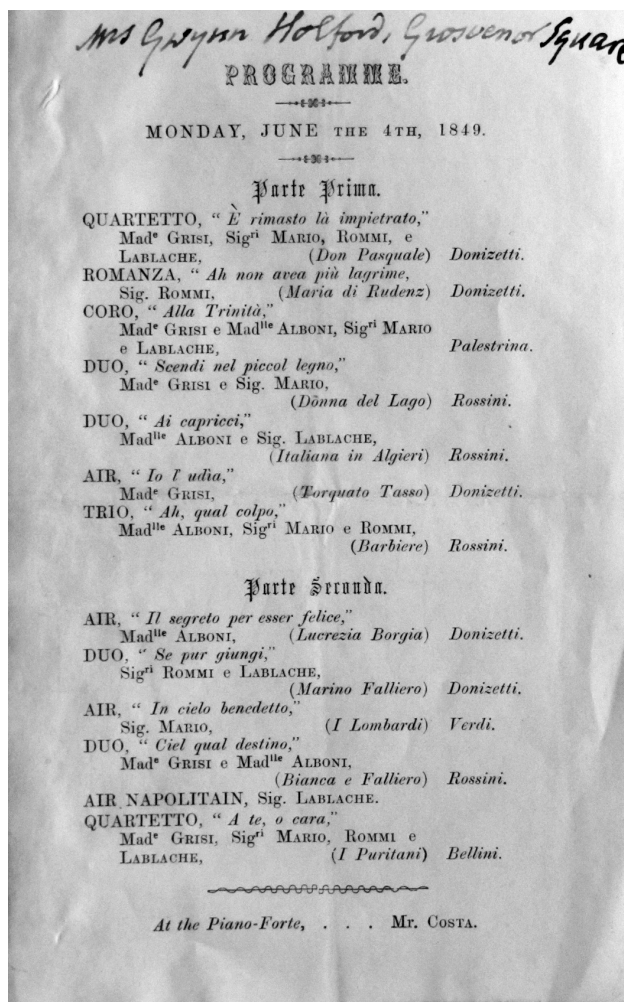


Fig. 8.1 Private concert, Grosvenor Square (4 June 1849).

⁹ Fétis, 'State of Music in England', 245.

which 'Costa accompanied on the piano beautifully'.¹⁰ At a private concert in 1836, Grisi, Malibran, Rubini and Tamburini sang 'a very beautiful quartetto by Costa' – 'Ecco qual fiero istante'.¹¹ In 1842, Costa conveyed the 'disconcerting news' that Persiani, Mario and Lablache were too ill to attend a royal concert party. 'After a lengthy discussion on the subject, we settled to have the party anyhow and, if the artists could not sing, to have a dance.'¹² In 1850, a concert involving Pasta was 'The greatest treat for me as I could hear it quietly, there being but few people. I talked to all of the singers and to Costa.'¹³ At Osborne House, Victoria slipped into a rehearsal by Mario, Lablache, Castellan and Costa – 'which was a real treat'.¹⁴

Costa quickly became a regular part of Victoria and Albert's musical life, along with his fellow Neapolitan Lablache, who gave the Queen singing lessons. Costa would provide scores and sing them through with the Queen and Albert. 'Costa and Lablache came [to Osborne House] and we sang with them for a short while. Costa's accompanying is a wonderful support and assistance.'¹⁵ An entry for 1843 records that:

A little after 6, we had a very nice little amateur concert, Costa coming down from London, and we sang with him (he singing the tenor parts and accompanying us)... We went through the whole of that beautiful little *Requiem* by Mozart...and with Costa's powerful accompaniment it really sounded very well and full. It was a great treat. He is such a perfect musician and helps one so much, keeping all so well together. His voice is pleasing though not very powerful.¹⁶

¹⁰ RA QVJ 18 May 1835.

¹¹ RA QVJ 16 May 1836.

¹² RA QVJ 24 April 1842.

¹³ RA QVJ 28 July 1850.

¹⁴ Gye, 5 Aug. 1850.

¹⁵ RA QVJ 6 Aug. 1850.

¹⁶ RA QVJ 21 Oct. 1843.

He also briefed the Queen on musical matters. In 1849, he wrote to inform her that *Le prophète* had gone very well in spite of having only two rehearsals: Viardot was ‘sublime’ and Mario ‘excellent’.¹⁷ It was to Costa that she grumbled about a poor piano version of this opera. He replied in French ‘Her Majesty is completely right in finding the arrangement of *Le prophète* for four hands “*n’est pas grand chose*”. But sadly it is the only one that exists’ – though he promised to do a better version from the full score when he had time.¹⁸ Costa became the opera house’s main channel of communication with the royal family. Victoria’s adviser Baron Stockmar reported that he had seen Costa ‘who is to speak immediately to Mr Laporte’ to free singers for a concert. ‘Mr Costa will be at 5 o’clock this evening at Baroness Lehzen’s, to receive Her Majesty’s commands.’¹⁹ Costa interceded with the Queen not to command the orchestra when they were needed for the dress rehearsal of *Robert le diable*; and not to press for Viardot to sing in *Fidelio*, as she had dropped the part.²⁰

After Albert’s death in 1861, royal patronage declined and the Queen’s infrequent concerts became more conservative and military in flavour. Clara Schumann describes a dire event in 1872, at which a small group of listeners struggled against the noise of 600 promenading guests and a philistine royal party. ‘This Queen is not going to see me under her roof again; of that I am sure!’²¹ Costa retained his links with the royal family mainly as a leading mason (with the Prince of Wales) and as music tutor to the Princess Royal and Princess Louise.

¹⁷ RA VIC/Add C 4/137 25 July 1849.

¹⁸ RA VIC/Add C 4/142 31 July 1849. Author’s translation.

¹⁹ RA VIC/Y 152/3 14 Aug. 1837.

²⁰ Costa (March 1849, nd), RA VIC/Add C 4/117. Gye, 12 April and 17 May 1851.

²¹ Quoted in Joan Chissell, *Clara Schumann* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1981), 167.

8.3 Opera concerts

The proportion of opera excerpts at concerts rose from 17% in the 1820s, to peak at 24% in the 1830-40s and settle

down again at 12% in the 1850s.²²

The King's Theatre and later

Covent Garden tried to cash in on

this trend by putting on morning

concerts. A typical concert at

Covent Garden involved three

overtures (*Leonora*, *Semiramide*,

and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*),

operatic extracts from *Semiramide*,

Lucrezia Borgia, *Il barbiere di*

Siviglia, *Don Giovanni*, *Lucia di*

Lammermoor, *Don Pasquale*,

Masaniello and *Les Huguenots*, a

fantasia performed by the

'Celebrated Pianist' Alexander

Dreyschock, a double-bass solo by Giovanni Bottesini and favourite *morceaux* by a

group known as 'The Hungarian Vocalists'.²³

Although socially prestigious, the opera and salon concerts lacked the aesthetic cachet of instrumental concerts. But, with the best orchestra in London, they evolved to perform more focussed programmes with an increasing share of symphonic music (Fig.

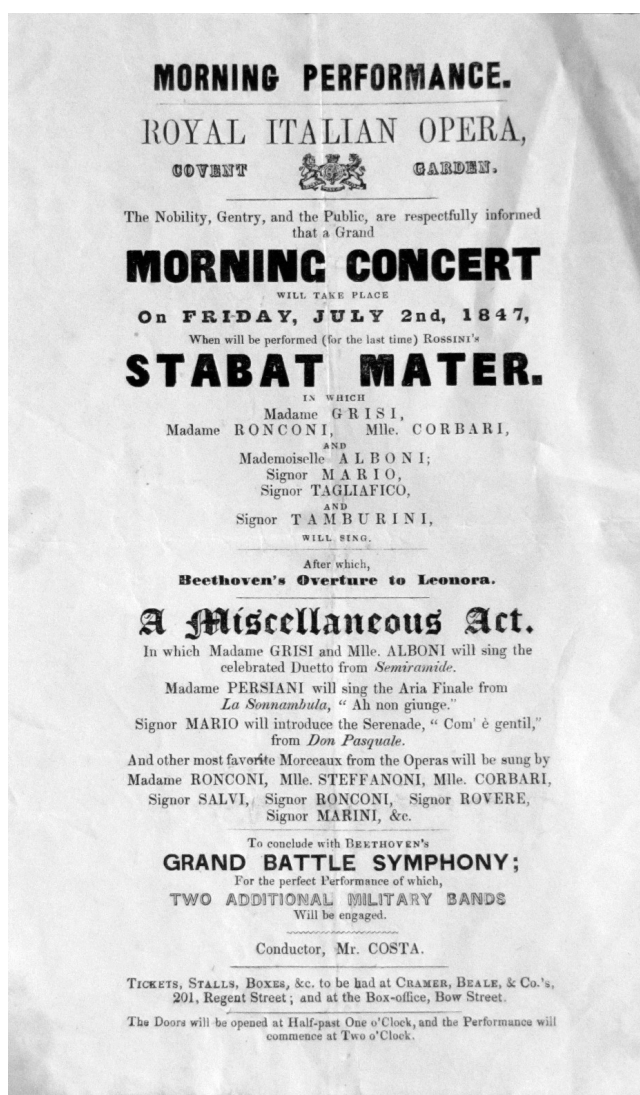


Fig. 8.2 Opera concert of 1847, showing the trend to more focussed programmes.

²² McVeigh, 'Benefit Concerts in 19th Century London'.

²³ Poster on the ROHC website, ROH/MAR/POS/2256.

8.2). This gave Costa the chance to show that he could conduct the German instrumental repertoire. After the 1856 fire, Costa and Gye transferred their opera concerts to the larger venue of the Crystal Palace; the income (£1.400) kept the company afloat while Covent Garden was being rebuilt. Their success led the SHS to hold the triennial Handel Festival at the Crystal Palace and paved the way for the long and influential series there under August Manns.²⁴ After Costa ceased to conduct the opera concerts after 1859, they went into decline under Alfred Mellon and Bottesini.

8.4 The Philharmonic

The *laissez-faire* diversity of the London market prevented the development of a specialised concert orchestra of the kind that dominated Paris (the Conservatoire) or Vienna (the Philharmonic). From its start in 1813, the London Philharmonic drew extensively on the opera house players. Founded in a mood of idealism untouched by economics, it lacked a professional management structure. Its ethos was high-brow and xenophiliac, initially excluding vocal or instrumental solos and concentrating on orchestral works that were beginning to be labelled ‘classical’ and would later be considered ‘canonical’.²⁵

The travails of the Philharmonic from the late 1830s are well analysed by Cyril Ehrlich: amateur management, falling subscriptions, internal feuding and especially divided control.²⁶ Whereas Costa’s introduction of baton conducting brought clarity to the opera house in the mid-1830s, use of the baton at the Philharmonic aggravated the competition between the conductor and leader. The Philharmonic thus became the focus

²⁴ Musgrave, *An audience for classical music*. Bowley, *Sacred Harmonic Society*, 41.

²⁵ Temperley, ‘Xenophilia in British Musical History’, 3-19. For a full discussion see William Weber in inter alia *The Rise of Musical Classics in Eighteenth Century England: a Study in Canon, Ritual and Ideology* (New York: Pendragon Press, 2000), 337-55.

²⁶ Ehrlich, *First Philharmonic*, Chapter 4, ‘The Quest for Leadership’.

of the debate about conducting. The issue was not the title of ‘conductor’ (which from 1820 applied to the man who sat at the forte-piano) or the use of the baton (which both Smart and Bishop wielded from 1833). The problem was that ‘conductors’ like Bishop and Smart were still struggling with the old system of divided control and lacked ‘that firmness with which a conductor should control his orchestra’.²⁷ ‘We need but compare the orchestra of the Italian theatre under one head with that of the Philharmonic Concerts under many to prove the error of the system pursued at the latter.’²⁸

Between 1840-45, the 48 Philharmonic concerts were led by only three leaders, who were well placed to eclipse the seven part-time ‘conductors’.²⁹ The *Musical World* claimed that the main obstacle to better Philharmonic performances was ‘the appointment of several conductors to one orchestra’, a policy which which was also being applied at the Ancient Concerts – despite George Smart’s resignation in protest.³⁰ Four years later, it was assumed that Mendelssohn’s unprecedented appointment for six concerts would resolve the problem.³¹ But Mendelssohn stayed for only five concerts and even he had to share control with the leader Tom Cooke.

There remained two further obstacles to lasting reform. First, the widespread belief among Philharmonic members that a conductor’s duty was to be an ‘animated metronome’, without any ‘voice in council or selection’.³² The *QMMR* bluntly stated

²⁷ *Athenaeum* (16 May 1840), 403.

²⁸ *MW* (26 March 1840), 187.

²⁹ *Spectator* (18 May 1844). The leaders were F Cramer 10, Loder 21 and Cooke 17; the ‘conductors were Potter 6, Moscheles 11, Smart 9, Bishop 8, Mendelssohn 6, Lucas 6, Bennett 2. Foster, *Philharmonic Society*.

³⁰ Leader in *MW* (26 March 1840), 185-8.

³¹ *MW* (25 April 1844), 141.

³² *ILN* (9 Aug. 1845), 90. *Athenaeum* (2 Aug. 1845), 772.

that ‘The Committee are the legislative and the conductor the executive power.’³³

Secondly, the Society’s ethos remained hostile to authority and prone to faction.

Mendelssohn commented privately on ‘the radical evil which I have this time amply experienced...[which] must prevent the Society continuing to prosper – the canker in its constitution – musical rotten boroughs etc’.³⁴ In 1845, the *Athenaeum* observed that the players, who ‘hardly endured Dr Mendelssohn’, were ‘even less disposed to submit to a resident’.³⁵ Davison saw his close friend Sterndale Bennett as ‘by far the best’ for the job; but he believed that appointing a London-based conductor ‘would be the cause of endless discussions, and most undesirable displays of ill-feeling and petty prejudice’.³⁶

These undercurrents cast doubt on the accepted narrative that, having knocked the opera house into shape, Costa was seen as the natural candidate to do the same for the Philharmonic. Costa had been blackballed as a Philharmonic member and there was still strong resistance, especially from the ‘native talent’ lobby.³⁷ In addition both Chorley and Davison took the view that Costa lacked the pedigree to conduct the basically German instrumental repertoire of the Philharmonic. The *Musical World* had long decided that ‘Signor Costa is not at home in the German school of music’.³⁸ One editorialist there (‘JG’ – presumably not Davison) believed that ‘If M. Costa’s appointment takes effect...then adieu to the fame of the Philharmonic’.³⁹ Chorley felt that the appointment of Costa would be ‘outrageously unpopular, both with Germans

33 *QMMR* (vol. 8, no. XXX), 438.

34 Mendelssohn-Paul, *Felix Mendelssohn’s Letters*, ed. Paul Elek (London: Cole, 1946), 182-3.

35 *Athenaeum* (12 July 1845), 697.

36 *MW* (24 June 36), 22 and (25 April 1844), 141-2.

37 *ILN* (9 Aug. 1845), 90.

38 *MW* (24 June 1836), 22.

39 *MW* (30 Jan. 1845), 50. But the editor (‘MW’) did not endorse this view.

and Englishmen'. As an Italian, he was already liable 'to spoil by exaggeration the operas of Mozart'. A similar approach to Beethoven's symphonies would be fatal:

A conductor of German music can only be satisfactory so far as he is able to germanise himself; and this neither Signor Costa nor M. Habeneck seems able to do. We have better hopes of the former however because, besides being the younger man, he studies deeply.⁴⁰

But with Mendelssohn unavailable, the Philharmonic was in crisis. Ella, the leader of the second violins, wrote in his diary that only 'total regeneration' would save the Society from decay.⁴¹ After being turned down by Spohr and Habeneck, the Society in desperation invited Costa to take on the 1845 season. When Lumley refused to release Costa from his contract at the opera, they appointed Henry Bishop, who again demonstrated his 'want of a presiding spirit...the conductor had no control over his orchestra and the orchestra did not seem to understand the gyrations of the conductor's baton'.⁴² As criticism crescendoed, Bishop resigned after three concerts and the season was tamely continued under Lucas and Moscheles. Hogarth, the Philharmonic Secretary, commented that 'At no period of the Society's history has it been exposed to greater attacks on management and disquieted by meaner intrigues.'⁴³ Offers to conduct in 1846 were turned down by Marschner, Lindpainter and Guhr.

The resistance to structural reform within the Philharmonic was apparent when the Society turned again to Lucas, only to reject his demands for 'more rehearsals and absolute power, without the interference of leaders'.⁴⁴ It was obvious that Costa would be at least as demanding as Lucas. But meanwhile two important changes had occurred.

⁴⁰ *Athenaeum* (16 Nov. 1844), 1051.

⁴¹ *RMU*, 11 March 1845.

⁴² *MW* (24 April 1845), 183

⁴³ *ILN* (9 Aug. 1845).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

First, Costa was now free of his contract to Lumley and was being encouraged by Prince Albert to take on the Philharmonic.⁴⁵ Second, his conducting of German music at Her Majesty's was beginning to persuade Chorley and Davison that he was capable of handling the serious German repertoire.⁴⁶ A performance of *Così fan tutte* late in the 1845 season led Chorley to detect 'an increased temperance' and 'that universal comprehension of music to which few attain – and very few Italians'.⁴⁷

8.5 Costa at the Philharmonic

In the summer of 1845, the Philharmonic again approached Costa, offering a salary of 10 guineas an evening, twice the rate paid to Moscheles and Bishop.⁴⁸ His characteristically strict conditions were at first rejected but, when Costa then declined the job, the Directors conceded most of them, while reserving to themselves control over the repertoire (Appendix A).⁴⁹ He was hurriedly elected Associate and Member of the Society.

He began by radically changing the lay-out (Chapter 4) and demoting the leader. From 1846, Philharmonic programmes listed section principals instead of a leader. The *Athenaeum* rejoiced that Costa had been granted 'absolute power: 'It would be impossible to open the musical chronicle of 1846 with a more important announcement.'⁵⁰ Other reforms followed over the next few years. As the Society began to make a profit, Costa rationalised the orchestra's pay-scales, banned outsiders from

⁴⁵ *ILN* (4 July 1846), 11.

⁴⁶ *Athenaeum* (19 April 1845), 395. *MW* (24 April 1845), 181.

⁴⁷ *Athenaeum* (26 July 1845), 744.

⁴⁸ His salary was raised to 15 guineas in November 1851. Costa-Watts (12 Nov.1851), BL PRS MSS 339/223.

⁴⁹ Costa letter (16 Aug. 1845), Foster, *History of the Philharmonic Society*, 193.

⁵⁰ *Athenaeum* (3 Jan. 1846), 18.

rehearsals and stopped lead players from sending substitutes to rehearsals (Chapter 4). Around 1850 he standardised ‘Philharmonic’ pitch at the level of the Covent Garden orchestra.

In two areas, he had more difficulty at the Philharmonic than elsewhere. He could not escape the rule of one rehearsal per concert. The *Times* described as ‘preposterous’ the Philharmonic allowing only a single rehearsal for an 1847 programme marathon concert involving Spohr’s Symphony in C minor, excerpts from Mendelssohn’s *St Paul*, Beethoven’s Mass in C and his Symphony no. 9.⁵¹ Not surprisingly the latter, which had received a ‘not over successful’ performance in 1825 after a nervous Smart had recommended postponement, contained ‘glaring imperfections’. The other area where he met opposition was over weeding out less competent players. This had to be approached gradually and with tact, since good players were still in short supply and some elderly instrumentalists were protected by Directors.

Overall Costa’s were the most radical reforms that the Philharmonic saw in the nineteenth-century. He was able to carry them out because the Society needed services that only he could provide. He alone could coordinate rehearsals and performances between the Philharmonic and the opera orchestra; save rehearsal time by importing pieces that had already been performed at Covent Garden; and bring back the opera stars, who had been denied to the Society since 1836.⁵² The Philharmonic archives contain many requests to him to negotiate the appearance of individual soloists.⁵³ He had the loyalty of the first violin, Tom Cooke, and was popular with the players who

⁵¹ *Times* (30 March 1847). Foster, *Philharmonic Society*, 71. Pamela J. Willets, *Beethoven and England* (London: British Museum, 1970), 51-2, 209.

⁵² *MW* (15 April 1836), 80. *Athenaeum* (30 April 1836), 315.

⁵³ Hogarth-Costa (15 May 1854) about Castellan, Lablache and Thalberg. BL RPS MSS 330/95.

welcomed his appointment.⁵⁴ He arrived at the Philharmonic with growing prestige.

There had been fears that he would accept ‘the tempting offers now being made to him

from the Continent’.⁵⁵ He had since 1839 been a British subject. The *ILN* commented

on his closeness to the royal family and their regret at his departure from Her

Majesty’s.⁵⁶ In February, the Queen pointedly complimented Costa at a state banquet by

commissioning the band to play selections from his opera *Don Carlos*.⁵⁷ She also made

a more public gesture at his second concert, praising his conducting and his new lay-

out.⁵⁸

These assets help to explain the remarkable impact he made during his first season. As

always the critics, especially Hogarth as Secretary of the Philharmonic, need to be

interpreted with scepticism. But one leading detractor, Chorley, was quick to eat his

earlier criticisms:

... the first Philharmonic Concert established Signor Costa in the foremost rank of conductors...we have heard no Philharmonic performance to compare with Monday’s...We felt conscious of an alertness and a submissiveness, a delicacy and a spirit new to the Hanover Square rooms; of a near approach to the highest continental style of finish, such as is produced at Leipzig under Mendelssohn and at Paris under Habeneck.⁵⁹

Davison, already taking sides against Costa in the battle of the opera houses, continued

to object to his ‘hyperboles of expression’ and excessive rallentandos, sticking to his

belief that ‘Costa is always safer with Haydn and Mozart than with Beethoven and the

modern writers’. But the *Musical World* eventually admitted that ‘a fitter man for the

⁵⁴ *MW* (21 March 1846), 130-1.

⁵⁵ *ILN* (4 July 1846), 11.

⁵⁶ *ILN* (7 Feb. 1846), 96.

⁵⁷ *ILN* (21 Feb. 1846), 130.

⁵⁸ *ILN* (4 April 1846), 226.

⁵⁹ *Athenaeum* (21 March 1846), 298.

post could not have been selected' and that Costa had 'benefitted the Society in a profitable as well as an honourable sense'.⁶⁰

Costa's first entrance in the orchestra was 'without a parallel. The instrumentalists and singers rose en masse and cheered for several minutes.' A trial run-through of the *Missa Solemnis* impressed an audience of sceptical connoisseurs. 'No other conductor in the world could have accomplished such a feat.'⁶¹ His first concert had a typically overloaded Philharmonic programme: Weber's Overture to *Oberon* (which was encored), two Haydn symphonies, Beethoven's Symphony no. 3 and a Spohr violin concerto. The *Musical World*'s verdict was one of 'unqualified satisfaction'.⁶² At the second concert, Beethoven's Symphony no. 6 'excited the auditory beyond measure', but the presence of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert prevented any encores. To make up for this restraint, there were three encores at the third concert, which offered Spohr's Symphony in D and Beethoven's Symphony no. 8. Chorley detected 'a much freer and more expressive handling of the music than we had expected...an increase of temperance, there being merely one or two *sforzandi* a little overloud...The power which Signor Costa has already gained over the orchestra was notably displayed...'⁶³

At the fourth concert, Costa risked his reputation by performing Mozart's Symphony no. 40, followed by Beethoven's *Choral Fantasy* and the first complete performance of the largely unknown *Missa Solemnis*. He was unusually allowed two rehearsals, though the *Times* observed that even four would not be enough for such difficult works.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ *MW* (21 March 1846), 130-1 and (23 May 1846), 238-9.

⁶¹ *ILN* (14 Feb. 1846).

⁶² *MW* (21 March 1846), 131.

⁶³ *Athenaeum* (25 April 1846), 434.

⁶⁴ *Times* (6 May 1846).

Despite ‘the bewilderment and discontent of the old subscribers’, the *Spectator* pronounced the orchestra ‘far better than at Bonn’.⁶⁵ Chorley commented that:

his was no case of a German master directing German singers who had all their choral lives been nibbling at portions of the work – but an Italian *maestro* called upon to beat the comprehension of its novelties into the overwrought and ill-paid music-manufacturers of a London season.⁶⁶

The remaining four concerts repeated the pattern: efficient performances of Beethoven, Haydn and Mozart, interspersed with a diet of overtures, arias and concertos (including Marie Pleyel playing Weber’s *Konzertstück*). Hogarth heretically pronounced that Costa’s reading of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* was better even than Mendelssohn’s. Costa had shown ‘beyond a doubt that he is one of the greatest conductors – if not the greatest in the world...it has been acknowledged by all factions in London...the symphonies and overtures of Beethoven, Haydn, Mozart, Weber, Cherubini, Mendelssohn, Onslow etc have never been so superbly rendered’. To celebrate a surge in subscriptions and a profit of £300, the Directors gave him a whitebait dinner and a piece of silver plate.⁶⁷

During the 1847 season, he had to combine eight Philharmonic concerts with his heavy first season at Covent Garden. Despite this remarkable burden, the critics echoed the praises of the previous year. Chorley judged that Beethoven’s Mass in C received ‘one of the most perfect performances as a whole at which we have ever been present in England or elsewhere...’⁶⁸ During Mendelssohn’s last visit, Costa shared the platform with him and conducted him in Beethoven’s Piano Concerto no. 4. The Queen described

⁶⁵ *Spectator* (1 May 1846).

⁶⁶ *Athenaeum* (9 May 1846), 485.

⁶⁷ *ILN* (4 July 1846), 11.

⁶⁸ *Athenaeum* (3 April 1847), 369.

the concert as ‘one of the best I ever remember. Costa conducted admirably Beethoven’s very fine [8th] Symphony’.⁶⁹ The Philharmonic again publicly thanked him ‘for services during the last two seasons, through which the Society was saved from destruction’.⁷⁰

Amid the plaudits, some remained unconvinced. The *Morning Post*, hostile to Costa’s role at Covent Garden, objected that he was ‘utterly unfitted by education... altogether out of his element’.⁷¹ Davison was still rooting for Sterndale Bennett and querying Costa’s tempi.⁷² But by 1852, he judged the orchestra irreproachable, except for some ‘passages where extreme delicacy and an absolute pianissimo are required’.⁷³ Chorley, always on the look-out for Italian foibles, warned that Costa, having freed himself from the English habit of ignoring accent and expression in the score, was giving too much emphasis to the *sforzandos*.⁷⁴ But he detected that this tendency to over-emphasis was passing and the orchestra was now very nearly as steady as the Paris Conservatoire.⁷⁵

Over the next four years, the novelty of a reformed orchestra, Costa’s success with the German repertoire and the surfeit of talented refugees from the Continent ensured that he and the orchestra continued to receive enthusiastic reviews. There were ritual reports of ovations for Costa – the ‘Atlas of the Society’ – and favourable comparisons with Habeneck and Mendelssohn.⁷⁶ In 1853, he gave the first London performance of

⁶⁹ QVJ, 26 April 1847.

⁷⁰ *ILN* (26 June 1847), 410.

⁷¹ *Morning Post* (30 June 1846).

⁷² *Times* (30 March 1847).

⁷³ *MW* (3 April 1852), 213.

⁷⁴ *Athenaeum* (19 March 1853), 359.

⁷⁵ *Athenaeum* (12 June 1847), 628.

⁷⁶ *ILN* (3 July 1852), 14.

Cherubini's Symphony in D, prompting the *ILN* to remark (in a dig at Chorley) that even his '*sforzando* critics were struck dumb by Costa's poetic readings'.⁷⁷

Over nine years, Costa conducted all but two out of 73 Philharmonic concerts – more than Smart (49) and Bishop (39) had undertaken. It was a period of rising standards and financial success. Wagner described the Philharmonic as 'a magnificent orchestra, as far as the principal members go...strong *esprit de corps* – but no distinct style or fire of inspiration'.⁷⁸ When Berlioz shared the platform with Costa in 1853, his friend Ganz recalled that he expressed 'unbounded surprise' at the quality of the orchestra and declared diplomatically that 'one rehearsal will be ample with your orchestra'.⁷⁹ In 1853, Chorley wrote of 'a force, brilliancy and brio such as we now get from no orchestra save at the hands of Signor Costa. Ten years ago there was no such execution attainable in England.'⁸⁰

Gradually, as higher standards began to be taken for granted, the focus of comment shifted from the orchestra to the Society's cautious repertoire (Chapter 9). Critics grumbled about the Directors' 'Philharmonically orthodox' programming, which in one 1851 concert offered Beethoven's Symphony no. 9 after two hours of other music. In 1854, the *Athenaeum* summed up a season 'suicidal in its exclusion of novelty' and redeemed only by 'the beauty of orchestral execution...'⁸¹

This conservatism spawned a rival in the New Philharmonic Society, whose 1852 manifesto posed a direct challenge: 'The Society does not entertain the opinion *acted*

⁷⁷ *ILN* (7 May 1853), 339; and *Athenaeum* (19 March 1853), 359.

⁷⁸ Nettl, *The Orchestra in England* (London: Cape, 1946), 185.

⁷⁹ Ganz, *Berlioz in London*, 162 and Hogarth, *Philharmonic Society*, 230.

⁸⁰ *Athenaeum* (23 April 1853), 506.

⁸¹ *Athenaeum* (25 May 1854), 658.

upon by an elder institution that no schools but those which may be called classical are to be considered...' The New Philharmonic began bravely, with Berlioz offering a revelatory performance of Beethoven's Symphony no. 9 (after an unheard-of six rehearsals) and of parts of his own *Romeo and Juliet* Symphony and *The damnation of Faust*. Clara Schumann performed her husband's Piano Concerto in 1856, ten years before the old Philharmonic tackled it. The New Philharmonic went through the familiar cycle of new ventures: a reformist agenda, backed by generous rehearsals and extravagant early reviews, leading to disenchantment as finances ran out of control, standards fell and the repertoire stagnated. But it damaged the old Philharmonic, which made a loss of £50 in 1854.⁸²



Fig. 8.3 William Sterndale Bennett (1816-75)
Costa's adversary at the Philharmonic.

A more serious challenge to Costa came from Sterndale Bennett (Fig. 8.3). Having voted against Costa's appointment in 1846, Bennett resigned because he was 'sick to death' of hearing him described as the greatest conductor in the world.⁸³ Their mutual antagonism became notorious after Costa, offended by a tactless note from Bennett asking him to take the latter's overture *Parisiana* more briskly, declined to

⁸² *MW* (7 March 1852), 203, (29 July 1854), 504 and (23 April 1855), 255.

⁸³ Bennett-Mendelssohn (April 1846), Bennett, *Life of Bennett*, 166.

conduct it.⁸⁴ Although the Directors took Costa's side, Bennett was re-elected as Director in 1853 and Costa stayed only on condition that he need not attend meetings or conduct pieces of which he did not approve (Chapter 9).⁸⁵ Early in 1854 Costa sought again to resign but was persuaded to delay his departure until the end of the season.

His ostensible reasons for resigning were ill-health and a commitment to complete his oratorio *Eli* for the Birmingham Festival. He was undoubtedly overworked, but other factors also played a part. The amateur ethos of the Society and the interference of its Directors thwarted his plans to ease out well-connected older players and left him 'comparatively unserviceable'.⁸⁶ The *Examiner* was probably correct when it commented that Costa could not bear to be 'ruled in council by those who were in every respect very subordinate to him'.⁸⁷

The Directors seem to have hoped that he would stay on, since they did not approach Spohr and Berlioz until late in 1854 before rushing to engaged Wagner on a one-year contract.⁸⁸ Wagner's demands for a subordinate conductor and generous rehearsals were predictably rejected. His unhappy season, which produced a deficit of £400, has been extensively analysed elsewhere.⁸⁹ He made a significant impact, not least with English premieres of his own works. But although Wagner later claimed that he enjoyed the full support of the players, the royal family and the cognoscenti, his year with the Philharmonic was an unhappy experience all round. The *Musical World* commented that

⁸⁴ Ehrlich, *First Philharmonic*, 80 and 86-7.

⁸⁵ Gye, 30 Jan. 1853. Costa-Watts (7 Jan. 1853), BL MSS. 339. MSS 330/75v.

⁸⁶ *MW* (27 March 1852), 202. Cox, *Musical Recollections*, vol. 2, 289. Letter from Philharmonic Society member to the *MW* in 1855, quoted by Carse, *Beethoven to Berlioz*, 387.

⁸⁷ *Examiner* (17 March 1855).

⁸⁸ Letters of 27 Nov. 1854 (to Spohr) MSS 330/96v and 24 Dec. and 1 Jan. to Berlioz. BL MSS 330/97 v and 98.

⁸⁹ Ehrlich, *First Philharmonic*, 88-92. Hogarth, *Philharmonic Society*, 107-10.

performances were ‘so markedly worse than usual’ and that Wagner stood convicted of ‘one of the profoundest failures on record’.⁹⁰ Henry Smart described him as ‘the worst conductor to whom the Philharmonic baton has yet been entrusted...the same wavering, fidgety, uncertain beat which bewildered the band at the first concert’.⁹¹ Even the generous Hogarth later wrote that Wagner was ‘unable to gain the confidence of the orchestra or the favour of the public’ and that the 1855 season was ‘neither pleasant or successful’.⁹²

The uniformly negative reviews reflect in part the conservatism the London musical world and its resentment against Wagner’s writings and his cavalier attitude towards Mendelssohn. But the common theme was the contrast between ‘the strict military rule of Mr Costa’ and Wagner’s beat, which was ‘wholly wanting’ and ‘fails to indicated the divisions of a bar with anything like intelligible point’.⁹³ Wagner’s conducting of overtures by Mozart and Mendelssohn were described as ‘unintelligible’ to those who knew them.⁹⁴ Significantly the Dresden authorities had in 1848 expressed their ‘deep dissatisfaction with Wagner’s conducting, including the complaint that he had ‘beaten time incorrectly’.⁹⁵

The next three decades at the Philharmonic are described by Ehrlich in a chapter ominously entitled ‘Plateau and Descent’. The record of Sterndale Bennett (1856-66) and William Cusins (1866-84) lies outside this thesis, but their tenure throws interesting

⁹⁰ *MW* (30 June 1855), 416.

⁹¹ Henry Smart, quoted in Elkin, *Annals*, 56.

⁹² Hogarth, *Philharmonic Society*, 107 and 110.

⁹³ *MW* (30 June 1855), 416-7.

⁹⁴ *Examiner* (17 March 1855).

⁹⁵ Kohler, *Richard Wagner*, 217.

light on Costa's achievement. Many of his services had been invisible – rehearsal practice, tight ensemble, retention of talent and replacement of incompetent players. These skills were greatly missed, as was his ability to bring in the opera singers and coordinate opera and Philharmonic timetables. Above all, there was a loss of authority and discipline. It is impossible to imagine Costa tolerating the turf war that occurred in 1856 between four leaders; or accepting a 23% cut in orchestral expenses between 1856 and 1858; or agreeing to cut the Philharmonic season to six concerts; or failing to avert the conflict between Covent Garden and the Philharmonic over Monday performances, which deprived the latter of forty players from 1862.⁹⁶

Costa's achievement at the Philharmonic established that he was competent beyond the realms of opera. In retrospect he failed to achieve the hopes aroused by his early successes at the Philharmonic. The Society did not become, as Gruneisen had predicted in 1846, 'the true sphere of our musical excellence – a nucleus round which all that is great in art must aggregate'.⁹⁷ Some of Costa's reforms were reversed, especially the banning of deputies, exclusion of outsiders from rehearsals and the centralisation of control.⁹⁸ Standards fell as the Society, without Costa's ability to manage the limited pool of able players, struggled to compete with the New Philharmonic and August Manns' Crystal Palace concerts, which were to provide the main impetus for orchestral advance in the next two decades.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Ehrlich, *First Philharmonic*, 105-8.

⁹⁷ Article of March 1846 in unidentified newspaper, Ella f. 22.

⁹⁸ Ehrlich, *First Philharmonic*, 54.

⁹⁹ Musgrave, *An audience for classical music*, (1996).

8.6 The Sacred Harmonic Society

Since its formation by mainly middle class Dissenters in the sectarian turmoil of 1832, the SHS flourished sufficiently to fill London's largest concert room, the Exeter Hall (Fig. 8.4). Enjoying the support of Mendelssohn and the royal family, it bid fair to overtake the venerable Ancient Concerts and become the focus of England's burgeoning

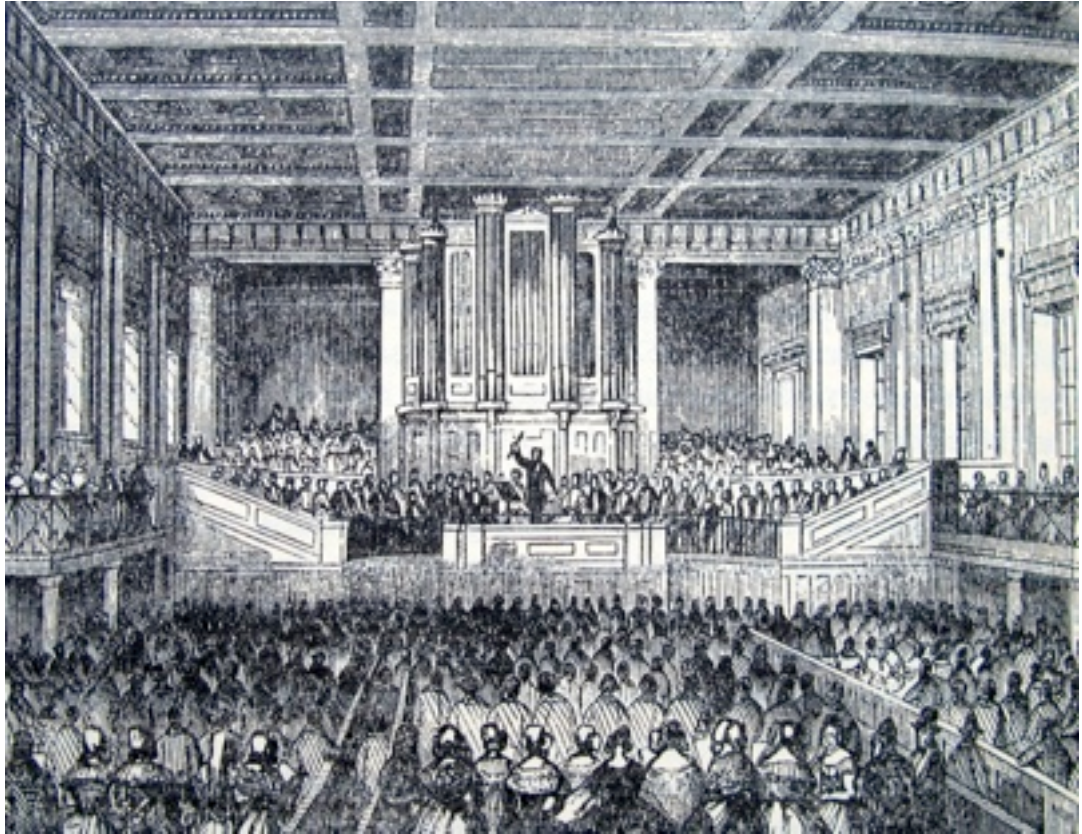


Fig. 8.4 An SHS concert in the Exeter Rooms in 1840, the conductor facing the audience.

choral movement. By the 1840s however it is possible to detect, between the lines of the Society's self-congratulatory annual reports, concern that its mainly amateur forces were struggling to achieve the discipline and control needed to master its staple repertoire of Handel and Mendelssohn. A fall in subscriptions forced the Society to sell stock in 1847-8. In Mendelssohn's last performance of *Elijah* in April 1847, he struggled with the 'rough and uncertain' orchestra and the 'most unruly and inefficient chorus'.¹⁰⁰ Above all there was concern about the lack of strong professional direction

100 Julius Benedict, *Sketch*, 52-3, contested by the SHS Treasurer, Bowley, *Sacred Harmonic Society*, 22.

under the ‘conductor’ Surman’s vacillating baton?¹⁰¹ After an inept performance of *St Paul*, the *ILN* prescribed ‘a conductor of great professional experience and tact and of



Fig. 8.5 Costa’s first oratorio concert. 1835.

moral weight with the orchestra’.¹⁰²

Costa had little experience of performing oratorios, apart from occasional concerts (Fig. 8.5) and a foray into the ‘monster concert’ business in 1837 with sixty choristers and ‘a spacious orchestra...in the style of the York and Westminster Festivals’. The SHS approached him not because of his proved competence in oratorios but because it needed a strong conductor, who could

introduce the order that Costa was delivering at Covent Garden and the Philharmonic. He was too busy to take charge for 1847/8 but, as the crisis deepened and Surman was dismissed, he agreed to conduct for the following season.

¹⁰¹ *Athenaeum* (26 Feb 1842), 195. Also *MW* (16 April 1840), 242.

¹⁰² *ILN* (18 March 1848), 185.

He promptly applied his formula – sole control, a clear beat, a new lay-out, strict discipline, punctuality, arduous rehearsal.¹⁰³ The offices of leader and organist were abolished. ‘New and stringent regulations’ enforced punctuality at rehearsals and made it easier to weed out weak singers and players.¹⁰⁴ At a commemorative performance of the revised version of Mendelssohn’s *Elijah* in November 1848, all of the critics noticed significant changes. The orchestra pit was reconstructed and laid out ‘nearly in the same way as in the Philharmonic’. The strings, ‘formerly very weak’, were reinforced and the band ‘beautifully balanced’, with the cellos and basses deployed behind the violins. The chorus was expanded and ‘wonderfully improved’ by the addition for the first time of women altos and boys ‘to sweeten the whole body of choral sound.’¹⁰⁵

In his first season, Costa attacked the main works of the oratorio canon, including Handel’s *Messiah*, *Judas Maccabeus*, *Israel in Egypt*, the *Dettingen Te Deum*, Haydn’s *Creation*, Beethoven’s *Mass in C*, and Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*, *Hymn of Praise* and *Athalie*. English critics, who were connoisseurs of oratorio and pedantic about shortcomings, reviewed his first season enthusiastically. He was praised for producing a remarkable improvement in a very short time, thanks to ‘the extra care now bestowed on rehearsal’.¹⁰⁶ The Society’s annual report announced a ‘marked improvement’ and a surplus of £244.¹⁰⁷ Henry Davison later wrote that he ‘instilled fresh life into the SHS, gave that respectable body a tonic, renewed its prosperity’.¹⁰⁸ Significantly, the advance of the SHS under Costa coincided with the closure of the Ancient Concerts, which was

¹⁰³ F.G. Edwards, *The History of Mendelssohn’s Elijah* (London: Novello, 1896), 25.

¹⁰⁴ *Daily News* (6 Feb, 1849).

¹⁰⁵ *Daily News* (2 Nov. 1848).

¹⁰⁶ *Times* reprinted in *Musical Times* (1 Feb. 1849), 109-10.

¹⁰⁷ These and other quotations are from the SHS annual reports for 1846-8.

¹⁰⁸ Davison, *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*, 108.

too conservative to reform itself after 71 years. John Ella believed that ‘Had the directors nominated Costa, instead of the late Sir Henry Bishop...he would have reorganised the choral and orchestral forces and infused vitality into the venerable institution.’¹⁰⁹

In 1849/50, the SHS returned to Mendelssohn’s *St Paul*, with an orchestra of 172 and 362 singers. Chorley reported that ‘The choruses went more brilliantly, firmly and delicately than ever SHS choruses went before Signor Costa took them in hand’.¹¹⁰ Davison criticised some departures from Mendelssohn’s tempi, but judged a repeat performance of *St Paul* ‘a nearer approach to the desired perfection than any previous execution of the work that we remember’.¹¹¹ The season ended with another profit (£260) and expanding subscription lists. The SHS’s own review of the year noted that ‘even works which had grown familiar by frequent repetition...yielded a new satisfaction and delight, both to performers and the auditory’. The seal of royal approval was added when Albert attended *Israel in Egypt* and Victoria went with him to hear Mendelssohn’s *Athalie* ‘which...Costa conducted splendidly’.¹¹² The highlight of 1850 was *Elijah*, a landmark performance ‘not so much from the effectiveness of the principal singers as from the choral and orchestral ensemble...The entire performance...is the greatest evidence of their extraordinary improvement under Costa’s artistical guidance’.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Ella, *Musical Sketches*, 334.

¹¹⁰ *Athenaeum* (2 Feb. 1850), 137.

¹¹¹ *Times* (12 Jan. 1850) and (16 Feb. 1850).

¹¹² RA QVJ 22 June 1849.

¹¹³ *ILN* (13 April 1850), 247.

The hey-day of the SHS came during the five months of the Great Exhibition in 1851, when it put on 31 performances and made a profit of £1,227. Performances were praised for their no-nonsense English qualities – ‘solid round tone in the chorus and no humbug in the orchestra’.¹¹⁴ Reviews typically claimed that the great works of Handel, Bach and Mendelssohn had never before been so well performed. Even Wagner recalled ‘the great precision of the chorus of seven hundred voices, which reached quite a respectable standard on a few occasions’.¹¹⁵ Spohr wrote that his *Calvary*, under ‘the excellent conducting of Costa’, left him ‘completely overpowered’; the impact was ‘more immense than the composer himself had ever conceived’.¹¹⁶

Costa brought other benefits to the SHS. His widening of the repertory and controversial re-orchestrations are considered in Chapter 9. He gave the SHS access to the leading singers from both opera houses, virtually imposing on them the young Adelina Patti.¹¹⁷ Having drilled the musicians to produce ‘that fire and vigour, which no conductor commands so certainly as Sig. Costa’, he began to win compliments for extracting ‘in many passages a beauty of tone and a delicacy of reading not hitherto obtained from such a mass of singers in London’.¹¹⁸ But, as a largely amateur body, the SHS’s forte continued to be the *fortissimo*. There were sometimes false entries and the vast choir was occasionally ‘unsteady’ – a grave crime in the world of heavy choral artillery. But deficient first performances often led to a better rehearsed second try – as with Mendelssohn’s *Christus*, which was criticised in November 1852 but presented

¹¹⁴ Nettel, *The Orchestra in England*, 142.

¹¹⁵ Wagner, *My Life*, 634.

¹¹⁶ Spohr, *Autobiography*, 304.

¹¹⁷ Klein, *Reign of Patti*, 95

¹¹⁸ *Athenaeum* (5 March 1859), 326 on *Solomon*.

with 'marked improvement' two weeks later.¹¹⁹ The Society's taking rose from £710 (1847) to £1167 (1852).¹²⁰

*Grandly performed
presented by H. Burn*

SACRED HARMONIC SOCIETY, EXETER HALL.
ON WEDNESDAY EVENING, MARCH 26, 1851.
WILL BE REPEATED HANDEL'S ORATORIO,
S A M S O N.

OVERTURE			PART I.		
Recit.	Mr. LOCKEY	This day a solemn feast	Recit.	Mr. H. PHILLIPS & Miss DOLBY	Brothers and men of Dan
Chorus		Awake the trumpet's lofty sound	Recit. acc.	Mr. H. PHILLIPS	O miserable change
Air	Miss BIRCH	Ye men of Gath	Recit.	Mr. T. WILLIAMS	O ever failing trust
Chorus		Awake the trumpet's lofty sound	Recit. and Air	Mr. H. PHILLIPS	Thy glorious deeds
Recit.	Mr. LOCKEY	Why by an angel	Recit.	Mr. LOCKEY	Why does the God of Israel sleep
Recit.	Miss DOLBY and Mr. LOCKEY	Matchless in might	Recit.	Miss DOLBY	There lies our hope
Air	Mr. LOCKEY	Total eclipse	Chorus	Mr. H. PHILLIPS & Mr. LOCKEY	Then shall they know
Chorus		O first created beam	Recit.	Mr. H. PHILLIPS & Mr. LOCKEY	For thee, my dearest Son,
			Chorus		Then round about the starry throne
PART II.			PART II.		
Recit.	Mr. LOCKEY & Miss DOLBY	My evil hopes are	Recit.	Mr. LOCKEY	Favour'd of heav'n
Air	Miss DOLBY	Return, O God of Hosts	Chorus		To man, God's universal law
Chorus & Solo	Miss DOLBY	To dust his glory	Recit.	Miss DOLBY	No words of peace
Recit.	Mr. LOCKEY & Miss DOLBY	But who is this	Air	Mr. WHITWORTH	Honour and arms
Recit. Air and Chorus	Miss BIRCH & of Female Voices	My faith and truth	Recit. and Duet	Mr. LOCKEY & Mr. WHITWORTH	Go, baffled coward, go
Chorus		Her faith and truth	Recit.	Miss DOLBY	Here lies the proof
Recit.	Mr. LOCKEY	Ne'er think of that	Chorus	Mr. WHITWORTH	Hast, Jacob's God
Duet	Miss BIRCH and Mr. LOCKEY	Traitor to love	Chorus		To song and dance,
Recit.	Miss DOLBY and Mr. LOCKEY	She's gone a serpent manifest	Chorus		Fix'd in his everlasting snare
PART III.			PART III.		
Recit.	Miss DOLBY	More trouble is behind	Recit.	Miss DOLBY & Mr. H. PHILLIPS	Your hopes of his delivery
Air	Mr. LOCKEY & Mr. WHITWORTH	Presuming slave	SINFONIA		
Recit.	Miss DOLBY & Mr. LOCKEY	Consider, Samson	Recit.	Mr. H. PHILLIPS	Hear's what noise!
Chorus		With thunder arm'd	Chorus		Hear us our God.
Recit.	Mr. LOCKEY	Be of good courage	Recit.	Miss DOLBY	Where shall I run
Air	Miss DOLBY & Mr. WHITWORTH	Thus when the sun	Air	Mr. H. PHILLIPS & Mr. T. WILLIAMS	Ye sons of Israel
Recit. & Air	Mr. LOCKEY	The Holy One of Israel	Chorus	Miss DOLBY	Weep, Israel, weep.
Chorus		To fame immortal go	DEAD MARCH		
Recit.	Miss DOLBY & Mr. H. PHILLIPS	Old Manassah	Chorus	(The Solo by Mr. H. PHILLIPS & Miss BIRCH)	Glorious hero
Chorus		Great Dagon has subdued our foe	Recit.	Mr. H. PHILLIPS	Come no time for lamentation
Recit.	Mr. H. PHILLIPS & Miss DOLBY	What noise of joy was that	Air	Miss BIRCH	Let the bright seraphim
Air	Mr. H. PHILLIPS	Now willing my paternal love	Chorus	(Trumpet Obligato, Mr. HARPER, jun.)	Let their celestial concerts

ORGANIST, MR. BROWNSMITH.
The BAND and CHORUS will consist of nearly 700 PERFORMERS.
CONDUCTOR - - - MR. COSTA.
The Doors will be Opened at SEVEN, and the Performance commence at HALF-PAST SEVEN, o'clock.
CORRECT BOOKS OF THE WORKS, 6d. each, to be had only at the OFFICE OF THE SOCIETY, No. 4, EXETER HALL, or in the Hall on the Evening of Performance.
It is earnestly requested that persons will not leave the Hall (except during the interval between the parts) until the conclusion of the Concerts, in order that the very large portion of the Audience desirous of hearing the works performed to their termination may be enabled to do so undisturbed.
In consideration of the sacred nature of the performance, the audience is requested to allow it to proceed without interruption from applause or encores.

Fig. 8.6 *Samson*. 'grandly performed' by the SHS. The audience is admonished not to applaud, demand encores or leave before the interval.

For three decades from 1848, Costa was Britain's leading exponent of the oratorio, performing one or two concerts a week during the Winter season (Fig. 8.6). The SHS came to be recognised as the leading oratorio society in Europe. Lamoureux took it as the model for the *Société de l'Harmonie Sacrée*, which he founded in Paris in 1873. The scale and quality of SHS performances became a source of national pride in an ethos

¹¹⁹ *Times* (5 and 17 Nov 1852).

¹²⁰ *Morning Chronicle* (12 Nov. 1853).

where oratorio was highly esteemed.¹²¹ After attending performances in Belgium, Holland, Germany and France, Gruneisen wrote ‘how proud I feel at the progress in my own country and how conscious I am that our advancement has mainly arisen from the...exertions...of the SHS’.¹²² The *ILN* described the SHS as ‘among the most extraordinary instances on record of the development of musical resources’.¹²³ Overall, the Society had an immense impact on amateur choral standards in London and, through the festivals, in the provinces.

The SHS remained Costa’s personal vehicle. It was here that he could most freely indulge his own musical preferences and his taste for voluminous well-controlled sound. A letter to his librettist described his pleasure at conducting a piano rehearsal of ‘300 voices, fresh and beautiful, full of vigour and good will’.¹²⁴ But by the 1870s, the SHS was losing status, as provincial choral societies became more capable. Past successes bred complacency and inertia.¹²⁵ The Society depended unduly on Costa’s prestige and his heavy infrastructure of support staff who, according to Grove, strained the Society’s resources.¹²⁶ In 1881, it had to leave the Exeter Hall for smaller premises in St James’ Hall. After Costa bowed out in the early 1880s, there was a move to sustain it under Halle but ‘Nobody could supply Costa’s place under the conditions of the time’ and it finally expired in 1883.¹²⁷

121 Leanne Langley, ‘The Musical Press in Nineteenth-Century England’, *Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association*, 46/3 (1990), 589.

122 Gruneisen-SHS (12 Nov. 1853), RCMA 4059.

123 *ILN* (2 Jan. 1869), 19.

124 Costa-Bartholomew (22 June 1864), RCMA 3025.

125 *Pall Mall Gazette* (29 April 1882).

126 Grove, *Pall Mall Gazette* (1 May 1884). Chapter 4.

127 Bennett, *Forty Years*, 334. *Times* (26 Feb. 1883).

8.7 The Festivals

The spread of choral festivals, especially in the northern cities, vividly illustrates the explosion of musical interest across England. The choral movement fostered new orchestras, commissioned new works and, from 1844, provided the main readership of the leading musical journal, Novello's *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* (author's underlining). It was boosted by the tuition systems developed by John Hullah and John Curwen.¹²⁸ It fed the growing fashion for the gargantuan – what Spohr called 'the habitual English taste for massive instrumentation'.¹²⁹ The choral societies, with their large amateur forces, were a spectacular exception to the trend towards passive consumerism, identified by Habermas as a by-product of the Industrial Revolution.

Music could not emulate the theatre by putting on long runs of the same work, but it could exploit the increasing size of the orchestras, choirs and concert halls. Costa became the leading purveyor of this particularly Victorian phenomenon. He was invited to conduct the Birmingham Festival in 1849, 20 years after his humiliating debut there. The *Musical Times* announced that Costa's orchestra would contain nearly 100 strings and that he would conduct in the new style, from the rostrum.¹³⁰ As usual, he demanded total authority and made systemic changes: more focussed rehearsals, a new lay-out and tighter discipline.

The *Times* reported that Costa's first Birmingham *Messiah*, achieved 'a style of unparalleled excellence' and that the Festival had been obliged to set aside its traditional

¹²⁸ For an account of the northern choral societies, see Brian Pritchard, 'The music festival and choral societies in England in the 18th and 19th centuries', PhD thesis (Birmingham, 1986), vol. 2, section C.

¹²⁹ Spohr, *Autobiography*, vol. 2, 312.

¹³⁰ *Musical Times* (1Aug. 1849).

ban on applause.¹³¹ The Festival consolidated his image as the rescuer of ailing musical institutions. Costa remained in charge for 33 years, raising its reputation and pursuing a modestly adventurous repertoire (Chapter 9). In 1858, the *ILN* compared the pre-eminence of the Birmingham Festival (in ‘the usual magnificent state’) with the ‘very far from successful’ Three Choirs Festival.¹³² The orchestra was described as ‘the finest and most accomplished in the provinces’ and the chorus was judged superior to any in Germany.¹³³

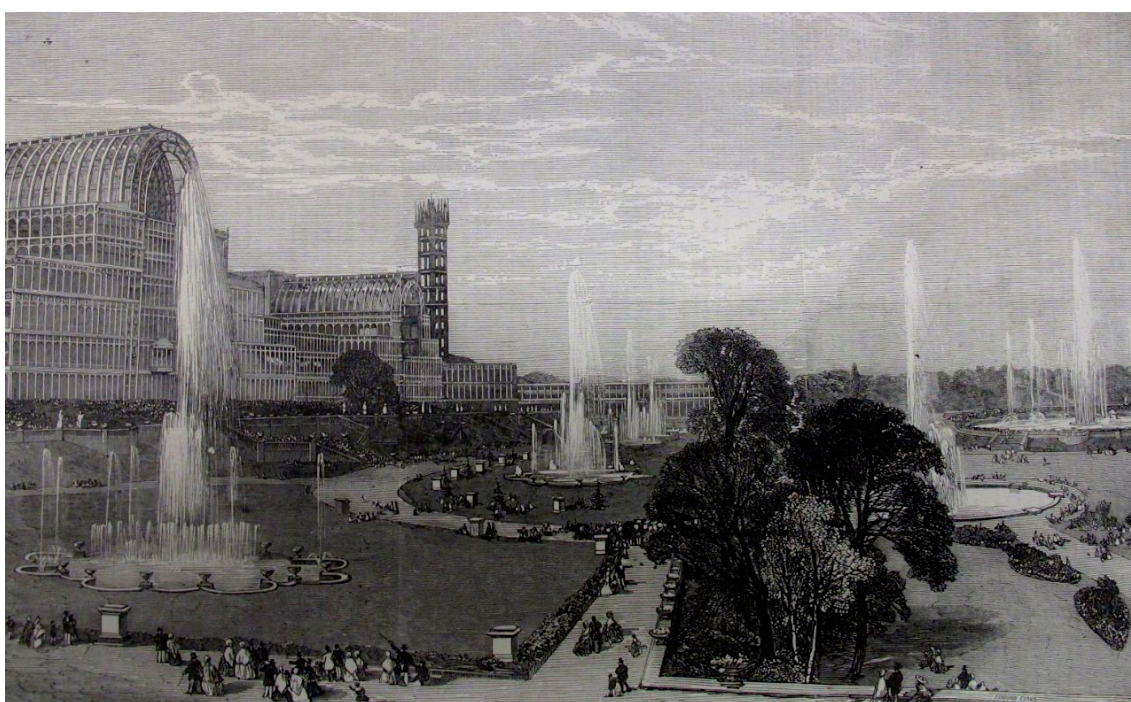


Fig. 8.7 The Crystal Palace, at Sydenham, the venue for Covent Garden concerts in 1856 and the Handel Festival from 1859.

His achievement in Birmingham led other cities to seek Costa’s services. In contrast with George Smart’s role in many minor festivals (Derby, Newcastle, Bury St Edmunds, Bath etc), Costa directed the more important festivals at Bradford (1853-57) and Leeds (1874-80) as well as one season in Glasgow. He was the natural person to oversee the

¹³¹ *Times* (5 Sept. 1849).

¹³² *ILN* (4 Sept. 1858), 221.

¹³³ *Graphic* (2 Sept. 1861 and 30 Aug. 1873).

re-opening of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham in 1854 after the unsatisfactory arrangements under Smart and Bishop at the 1851 Great Exhibition (Chapter 4).

The impressive scale and infrastructure of the 1854 experiment encouraged plans to make the Crystal Palace the home of a regular Handel Festival (Figs 8.7/9). Costa organised a trial event in 1857 in the revamped main nave, which became known as the Handel Auditorium. He assembled 1,200 singers from as far away as Limerick and put on three major concerts, building on his successful opera concerts there after the 1856 fire. The *Times* called it the greatest musical event of the year. When the audience demanded an encore of the 'Hallelujah' Chorus, the Queen broke tradition and nodded her assent to Costa.

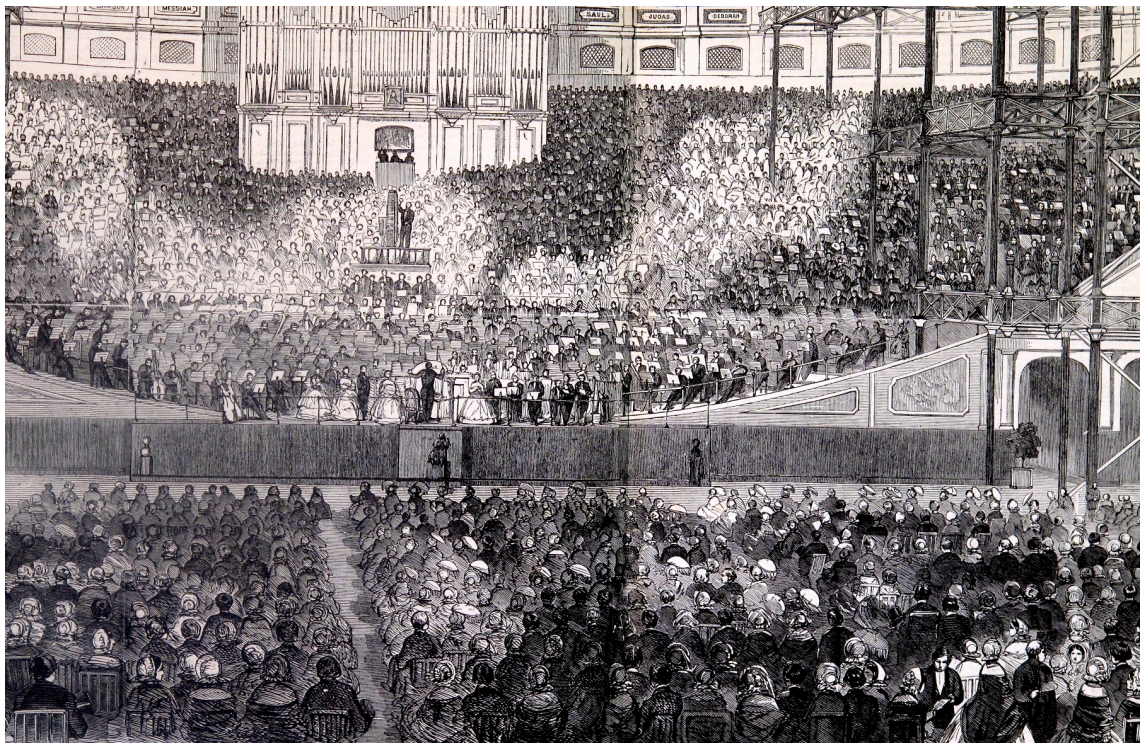


Fig. 8.8 The Handel Festival at the Crystal Palace (detail) (*ILN*, 27 June 1857, 630-1).

The critics were struck by the volume, precision and commitment of the singers.

Meyerbeer described the 1857 performance of *Israel in Egypt* as the most wondrous

display of choral power he had ever heard.¹³⁴ The *ILN* wrote that ‘Costa’s skill in handling huge forces is beyond praise’.¹³⁵ Chorley described vividly how:

The great mass of vocal sound seemed to sway to and fro, like a balloon when the inflation is consummated before it is allowed to break loose...it was no less evident that the mass was under control...The energy, mastery and animation of Signor Costa...were never more signally manifest...there was something vast, and noble and boundless – a delicious amplitude and richness of sound...which amounted to a new and poetic experience which went far to satisfy us that...even such monstrous performances as these may have real depth and truth and life and beauty as regards music.¹³⁶



Fig. 8.9 Costa conducting the Handel Festival. Sims Reeves singing. Distin's drum behind.

The obvious time gap between Costa's beat and the choir's entry showed that there were serious acoustical problems. The *ILN* commented that, since ‘the sounds were partially dissipated and lost in the vast space’, the building was ‘little better for musical purposes

¹³⁴ Bowley *The Sacred Harmonic Society*, 42.

¹³⁵ *ILN* (13 June 1857), 569.

¹³⁶ *Athenaeum* (20 June 1857), 797.

than the middle of an open field'.¹³⁷ Costa hit on the solution of totally enclosing the central nave. By 1865, the acoustics were satisfactory for the grand choruses but, in solo passages, 'a man must shout and a woman must scream in order to make themselves heard'.¹³⁸ Acoustical experiments continued and three years later Hogarth pronounced that 'the music was clearly and distinctly audible, from the thunder of the whole orchestra to the softest tones of every single voice or instrument'. The Palace was 'the grandest as well as the most agreeable music hall in existence'¹³⁹ (Fig. 8.8).

The Handel Festival became a triennial three-day event, usually consisting of the *Messiah*, another major work such as Mendelssohn's *Elijah* and a mixed programme introducing less familiar works by Handel and others (including Costa). Preparations began with the auditioning of amateur choristers in the provinces and rehearsals across the country. The quality of performance gained from the ability of the orchestra and chorus to work intensively together over four full days.¹⁴⁰ Artistic triumph was matched by financial success: by 1868, the attendance was 82,000 and takings were more than £100,000.¹⁴¹

Costa directed the Handel Festival until paralysis forced him to withdraw in 1883. It was here that the scale of his orchestral ambition found its fullest expression. The stage of the Festival was 16,016 square feet, compared with the Exeter Hall's 3,645 and the Philharmonic Hanover Rooms' 943.¹⁴² At each successive Festival, the press excitedly

¹³⁷ *ILN* (27 July 1857), 640.

¹³⁸ *ILN* (8 July 1865), 18.

¹³⁹ *ILN* (20 June 1868), 614.

¹⁴⁰ *Morning Post* (20 June 1857).

¹⁴¹ *ILN* (27 June 1868), 642.

¹⁴² Bowley, *Sacred Harmonic Society*, 48.

traced the growth of the chorus and audience and their transport and catering needs. In 1859, the audience of 81,000 consumed 19,200 sandwiches, 14,000 pies, 40,000 penny buns, 32,294 ices and 9 tons of beef.¹⁴³ Audiences were overawed by the scale and volume of the orchestra, which included 9 trombones, 3 ophicleides, 2 bombardons, 8 serpents, 3 double drums, 1 bass drum and one ‘monster drum’ (Fig 8.10). The young Prince Arthur reported breathlessly to Queen Victoria on a performance of *Israel in Egypt*: ‘Costa was there as conductor and I do not suppose anybody could lead a band of such an enormous number as 4000 better than he did. It was the most splendid sight I

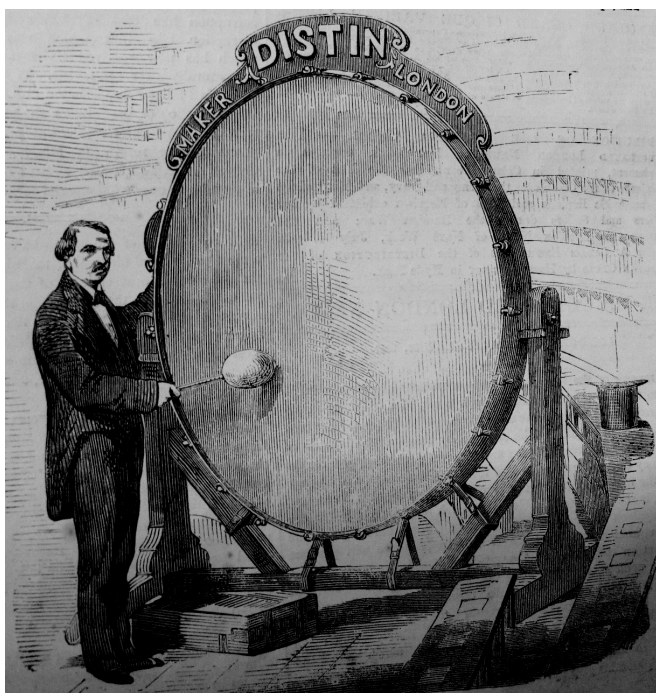


Fig. 8.10. Distin's ‘monster drum’ - ‘wonderfully rich and resounding’ (*ILN*, 27 June 1857, 627).

ever saw.’¹⁴⁴ Even Shaw admitted that ‘the effect was on the whole stirring and impressive’.¹⁴⁵

Contemporary writers were struck by the precision and sober enthusiasm of the performances. Hogarth gave the main credit to Costa ‘without whose profound knowledge of his art, practical experience, firmness, energy and indefatigable perseverance the

great design...could not have been accomplished’.¹⁴⁶ Chorley wrote that ‘The orchestra was without a fault – strong, superb and brilliant...under any other conductor...must

¹⁴³ *ILN* (2 July 1859), 22.

¹⁴⁴ Prince Arthur-Victoria (2 July 1865), RA VIC/Add A 15/710.

¹⁴⁵ *Shaw's Music*, vol. 1, 151.

¹⁴⁶ *ILN* (2 July 1859), 22.

such a scene have become one of hopeless confusion'.¹⁴⁷ The *ILN* speculated whether there were any limits to what could be attempted. 'After what we have heard, we do not see why we may not have 10,000 voices at the next festival.'¹⁴⁸

The Reverend Cox described a morning rehearsal at the Crystal Palace. 'Costa took his place with his accustomed punctuality amidst a perfect furore of applause both from the audience and orchestra.' He rehearsed parts of *Messiah*, then focused on less well-known parts of *Saul*, *Samson*, the *Dettingen Te Deum*, and *Judas Maccabaeus*, which many in the choir were singing from sight. The rehearsal audience demanded an encore of the 'Hailstone' chorus from *Israel in Egypt*, 'which Mr Costa yielded at once...with his usual grace and good humour'. There was a further ovation for Costa at the end, with the orchestra 'vying with the general public in their demonstration of respect'.¹⁴⁹

The Handel Festivals demonstrated the impressive advances in musical performance since the 1834 Handel Commemoration, when 'the orchestra and choral effects were not by many a degree to be compared with what has since been effected by the SHS'.¹⁵⁰

With their huge scale and solemnity, the Festivals Victorianised Handel and took on the flavour of a national institution. The Queen and Albert could be seen beating time with a fan and a scroll; and leading opera singers competed to reinforce the amateurs.¹⁵¹

The festivals, with their broad social composition, were seen as a symbol of cohesion in a country that many feared had fractured politically during the turbulent 1830-40s and

¹⁴⁷ *Athenaeum* (25 June 1859), 849.

¹⁴⁸ *ILN* (13 June 1868), 642.

¹⁴⁹ Cox, *Musical Recollections*, vol. 1, 333.

¹⁵⁰ Cox, *Musical Recollections*, vol. 1, 309.

¹⁵¹ For a good analysis of the Crystal Palace phenomenon, including Manns' concert series there, see passim Musgrave, *An Audience for Classical Music*.

was becoming aesthetically and socially polarised.¹⁵² They demonstrated the importance of the middle classes as consumers and patrons of music: ‘It is among...the middle classes of England that this divine art, in its best and noblest forms, is now making progress with a rapidity and sureness unequalled in any other country in the world.’¹⁵³ The Festivals showed how music could contribute to ‘the moral and intellectual training of the middle and lower orders of this country’.¹⁵⁴ They were also the main musical opportunity for London to meet the industrial cities and for amateurs to come together with professionals – encounters that did not flatter London.¹⁵⁵

At its height, the oratorio movement took on a religious and liturgical as well as a musical significance. Performances of the oratorios of Handel and Mendelssohn were part of ‘the musicalization of Victorian Protestantism’, reinvigorating the Protestant hymn tradition and blending national and civic pride with art and faith.¹⁵⁶ Davison described the audience at a performance of Mendelssohn’s *Sleepers Awake* at the 1853 Bradford Festival as ‘absorbed in one feeling of awe, united in one act of earnest and sincere devotion’; music, ‘the handmaid of religion, placed its fingers on the lips of the scoffer’.¹⁵⁷ Wagner detected here ‘the true spirit of English musical culture, which is bound up with the spirit of English Protestantism’, remarking that ‘an evening spent in

¹⁵² Weber, *Music and the Middle Class*, 24-5.

¹⁵³ *ILN* (25 June 1859), 22.

¹⁵⁴ *Times* (30 June 1862).

¹⁵⁵ *Athenaeum* (5 March 1859), 326 and (28 May 1859), 719.

¹⁵⁶ Ledger-Thomas, ‘Lyra Germanica, German Sacred Music in Mid-Victorian England’, *German Historical Institute London Bulletin*, vol. XXIX/2 (Nov. 2007), 30-32.

¹⁵⁷ *MW* (10 Sept. 1853), 577.

listening to an oratorio may be regarded as a sort of service, and is almost as good as going to church'.¹⁵⁸

Finally, the choral movement – and the Handel Festivals in particular – were evidence of English superiority in what Rokstro called the ‘cathedral’ of the arts.¹⁵⁹ Englishmen took pleasure in comparing their choral prowess with pedestrian performances in France.¹⁶⁰ The Festivals thus became the vehicle for a new musical confidence in a country that still smarted from the neglect and patronizing comments of its neighbours. They enabled English music-lovers to show, after all that had been said to the contrary, that ‘England may justly be classed as a musical nation’.¹⁶¹ The *ILN* boasted that ‘Nothing has shown so conclusively that England is pre-eminently a musical nation...’¹⁶² Indeed, many saw England as the defender of the tradition of Handel and Mendelssohn, who were elsewhere in retreat before the ‘Music of the Future’ and the ‘prophets of Baal’.¹⁶³

Costa’s handling of these monster festivals gave him a nation-wide reputation and helped to reinforce his image as an all-powerful conductor. Klein described him as ‘in his time the greatest choral conductor that England possessed’.¹⁶⁴ But for the musically sophisticated, the Festivals came to be seen as an expression of Victorian philistinism. Verdi dismissed such large-scale events as ‘a gigantic confidence trick’ and Wagner

¹⁵⁸ Wagner, *My Life*, 634-5.

¹⁵⁹ Grove 1, under ‘Oratorio’.

¹⁶⁰ On the Paris 1862 Exhibition, Bowley, *Sacred Harmonic Society*, 53. See also *Athenaeum* (26 March 1859), 427.

¹⁶¹ Cox, *Musical Recollections*, vol. 1, vi.

¹⁶² *ILN* (25 June 1859), 22.

¹⁶³ Ledger-Thomas, ‘Lyra Germanica’, 23-5. *Times* (5 Nov. 1852).

¹⁶⁴ Klein, *Thirty Years of Musical Life* (London: Heinemann, 1903), 55.

denounced their ‘folly’.¹⁶⁵ A later *Times* critic, Fuller-Maitland, said that they had ‘no more to do with Handel’s intentions than the Cup Tie’.¹⁶⁶ Writers like Shaw were especially scornful of the ritualisation of state events characterised by the heavy instrumentation of hackneyed works. A telling example was the programme for the opening of the Albert Hall in 1871, when Costa conducted Albert’s *Invocazione all’Armonica* and his own backward-looking cantata *Praise Ye the Lord* (Fig. 8.11). These pompous events raised Costa’s profile, but ultimately their effect was to obscure the achievements of his earlier years in the opera and concert hall and thus to dim his later reputation (Chapter 10).



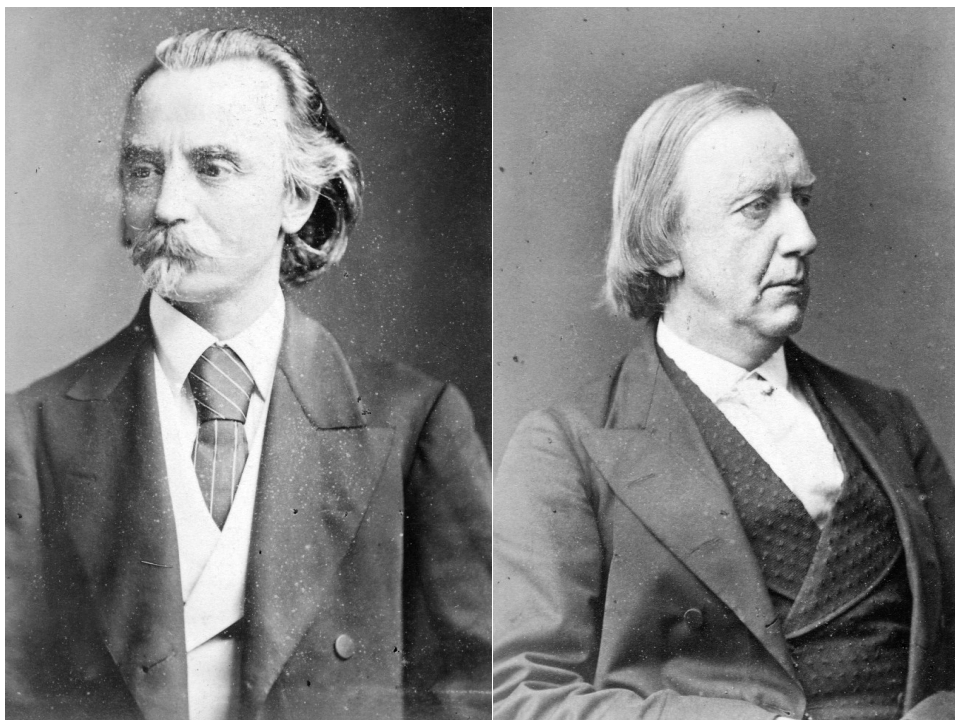
Fig. 8.11 Opening of the Albert Hall (1871).

By his last decade, Costa was no longer the only person capable of redeeming England’s faltering orchestras. Others like Halle in Manchester and Manns at the Crystal Palace were building cohesive orchestras with more modern repertoires (Figs 8.12/13). Foreign conductors like Richter were ready to take over the more prestigious festivals like

¹⁶⁵ Verdi-Escudier (28 June 1874), Norris, *Stanford*, 142. Wagner quote in Kohler, *Richard Wagner*, 179.

¹⁶⁶ Shaw’s *Music*, vol. 1, 151.

Birmingham. Moreover, festival organisers were beginning to find Costa's rigid terms expensive and irksome. The Leeds Festival balked at his reluctance to conduct Bach and



Figs 8.12/13 The next generation: August Manns (1825-1907) and Charles Halle (1819-95).

Beethoven's Symphony no. 9. It was a symbolic moment when the Leeds committee invited Costa to return on the understanding that the committee would select the repertoire and the band – conditions which Costa predictably rejected.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ William Spark, *Musical Memories*, 8.

Chapter 9: Composing, Arranging and Repertory

9.1 Composing

Although the music business was beginning to become specialised, there was still an assumption in 1830 that ‘A conductor must know how to compose even though he does not always compose the music he plays.’¹ Conducting had not yet become a separate profession in its own right – still less a respected one – and Costa’s status as a composer remained an important part of his image, especially in his early years. He was sensitive to the marketability of his works. He commented with pleasure that a lot of copies of *Naaman* had been sold ‘because I very often heard the turning of their leaves’.² He explained to Bartholomew that the ‘Morning Prayer’ in *Eli* sold 10 times more copies than the more popular and effective ‘Evening Prayer’ because it ended more satisfactorily for the purpose of separate publication.³

Costa took lessons in composition from Moscheles and devoted much of his limited free time to composing.⁴ His compositions are listed and briefly described at Appendix D. Having put on three operas during his years at the Naples Conservatoire, Costa wanted in particular to be accepted in the prestigious operatic arena.

9.1.1 *Malek Adhel* (1837)

His first opportunity to stake an international claim as an operatic composer came through a commission from the impresario at the Théâtre-Italien in Paris, Carlo Severini. His opera *Malek Adhel* had the benefit of the generous rehearsals that were the

1 Castil Blaize, 1821, quoted by Galkin, *History of Orchestral Conducting in Theory and Practice* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1989), 202.

2 Costa-Bartholomew (20 May 1865), RCMA 3033.

3 Costa-Bartholomew (24 Dec. 1862), RCMA 3013.

4 Cox, *Musical Recollections*, vol. 1, 108.

norm in Paris, and of an outstanding cast: Rubini sang the title role, Grisi the heroine Matilda, the other parts falling to Ivanoff, Tamburini, Lablache and Albertazzi. The *Musical World* claimed that it met with ‘decided success’ in Paris.⁵ The Paris-based composer Michele Carafa wrote to a friend describing his excitement at ‘the most fortunate debut of Michelino’.⁶

Reviewing the London production at the King’s Theatre two months later, the *Musical World* reported that ‘magnificence in every department has been the order of the day’.⁷ The *Morning Chronicle* judged it to be far better than Donizetti’s *Belisario* or Bellini’s *La straniera*.⁸ There was special praise for Rubini’s aria ‘Tiranno cadrai’, which remained in the repertory long after the opera was forgotten. Grisi too had a fine grand scena ‘Tu mi creasti’ and a dramatic trio with Rubini and Lablache. Queen Victoria, who sang through *Malek Adhel* with Lablache before it was performed in London, commanded an extra performance and told Costa she admired his opera very much.⁹

But John Ella, while reporting that French musicians were ‘agreeably surprised with the style of composition, instrumentation, and effects of certain harmonies’ added that ‘it was not entirely free from the trammels of scholastic conventions in design and treatment’.¹⁰ Chorley, who listed ‘Tiranno cadrai’ among his favourite tenor arias, anguished over the opera’s failure to ‘take’. At a second hearing, he summed it up as ‘the work of a man of talent if not genius’. He praised Costa’s ability to write for each

⁵ *MW* (28 April 1837), 111.

⁶ Carafa-Conti, F. Florimo, *La scuola musicale di Napoli e i suoi conservatori* (Naples: 1882). vol. 3, 330.

⁷ *MW* (26 May 1837), 172-3.

⁸ *Morning Chronicle* (19 May and 21 Aug. 1837).

⁹ RA QVJ 26 May 1837. *Morning Post* (4 July 1838).

¹⁰ Ella, *Musical Sketches in Paris in 1837*.

singer's strengths, though the high E flat that showed off Rubini's range meant that it was a role that 'no creature to come, in our time, may be able to attempt'.¹¹ Chorley also detected 'a want of fresh and spontaneous melody'.¹² Seven years later, he still defended *Malek Adhel* as 'a thoroughly conscientious work...in most respects a far better opera than Mercadante's latest works'. But he observed that Costa was caught between styles – between 'the old executive and the new declamatory schools'. He also commented on the opera's 'general seriousness, if not solemnity, of tone'.¹³ Like most of the operas staged in the period, it was never revived. One modern view, offered by Nigel Burton, is that *Malek Adhel* 'contains no innovative music whatsoever', though the aria 'Tu mi creasti' 'could pass for Donizetti'.¹⁴

9.1.2 *Don Carlos* (1844)

The production of *Don Carlos* marked the critical moment in Costa's effort to establish himself as an opera composer. Again the cast was the strongest imaginable – Grisi, Mario, Lablache and Fornasari. Queen Victoria broke tradition to attend the first night.¹⁵ But the production disappointed. The *Times* reported that the singers were exhausted by over-rehearsal; Mario in particular was too hoarse to sing his Act III aria 'T'amai qual'aman gli angeli', which was expected to be a highlight of the opera (Fig. 9.1). The public was not caught. Even the Queen was 'much disappointed, for all the songs, duets

¹¹ Chorley, *Musical Recollections*, 23.

¹² *Athenaeum* (27 May 1837), 338.

¹³ *Athenaeum* (29 June 1844), 604.

¹⁴ New Grove 2, vol. 6, 525.

¹⁵ *Times* (21 June 1844).

and trios were very commonplace, though there are many pretty bits and the finale of the second act is fine'.¹⁶

Costa's prestige ensured that he had respectful reviews.

One detected 'more dramatic power and orchestral

taste...than we have hitherto

given the author of *Malek*

Adhel credit for...a deep and

interminable ocean of

harmony', adding that

'Perhaps...there is a little too

much of this latter

element...'¹⁷ Davison found

the first act 'somewhat weak.

The music...merely goes on

in the beaten track...' The

second act contained 'a spirited chorus of grandees', a 'most meritorious' trio between

Philip, Carlos and Posa and 'an excellent quartet', but Costa had 'not shown himself

much of a creative genius'.¹⁸

Chorley stoutly maintained that the opera was full of good music, with effective

orchestral colour worthy of Cherubini. He singled out Costa's 'church effects' and his

Fig. 9.1 'T'amai qual'aman gli angeli'.

¹⁶ Gye, 20 June 1844.

¹⁷ Unidentified review of 25 June 1844 at the London Theatre Museum.

¹⁸ *Times* (21 June 1844).

ensemble writing, especially the trio. He blamed its failure on a crippling lack of melody and drama; and on the gloomy libretto, which reduced the passion of Schiller's original play to 'the hackneyed and sickly trio of a soprano faithless at heart to her husband – the basso and brute of the piece – with a tenor most musical and melancholy'. Unlike Rossini, Costa could not disguise a feeble story with enchanting melodies; and unlike Meyerbeer, he could not make up for melodic weakness by dramatic effects. 'The airs of display in *Don Carlos* are its least happy portions...Sig. Costa frequently takes refuge in oddities of interval...in breaking off where the ear wants to go on, in proceeding where a pause seems inevitable...' The chorus of the Inquisitors, which Meyerbeer would have made a centrepiece of the opera – and which Verdi *did* make a centrepiece of his version 23 years later – came over, in Costa's work, as 'bald commonplace'.¹⁹ The critics' main complaint was of the opera's lack of melodic impact.²⁰

It was not unusual, as Verdi and Berlioz discovered, for productions to be taken off prematurely. But *Don Carlos* never had the second opportunity that was often crucial to an opera's longer term survival. Lumley blamed this on the hostility of the subscribers and complaints from the cast '(in an undertone of course)' that the music was too high for their exhausted voices. Any chance of a revival was destroyed when Costa resigned from Lumley's company in 1845; and Covent Garden could not afford to take risks in its fragile early years. Failure in London and the lack of interest from Paris seem to have had a traumatic effect on him. Ten years later, when invited by Gye to write a new opera

¹⁹ *Athenaeum* (29 June 1844), 604.

²⁰ *Examiner* (22 July 1844). *Morning Post* (26 June and 21 July 1844).

for Covent Garden, he declined on the ground that ‘he was afraid, having no time for rehearsals’.²¹ By then his ambitions as a composer had switched to the oratorio.

9.1.3 Incidental and occasional music

One of Costa’s earliest duties as a Musical Director was to compose ballet scores. A ballet from his Naples days, *Une heure à Naples*, was dismissed as ‘vapid’.²² In 1831, he put on his first London ballet, *Kenilworth*, which was seen as an improvement but lacked ‘that striking character which contributed to...the popularity of [Auber’s] *Masaniello*’.²³ The following year he recycled parts of his Naples ballet into *Le Sire Huon*, based on the knightly hero of *Oberon*, as a vehicle for Marie Taglioni. The *Morning Post* found it pleasing, but reminiscent of ‘old fares’.²⁴ The *Athenaeum* found it heavy, with ‘too much drum, trumpet and...appoggiatura’, though a quartet for horns was admired.²⁵ His most successful ballet was *Alma* or *La fille du feu* (1842), danced by Fanny Cerito, which helped to raise Ceritomania to its height. It was praised as ‘light and elegant’ but with ‘little meat or novelty’.²⁶ Chorley commented that ‘his vein of melody is neither fresh nor plentiful’.²⁷ Some of Costa’s ballets found a place in the concert repertory. *Alma* and *Kenilworth* were still being performed in the 1880s.²⁸ But composing ballet music was not the road to celebrity: Costa did not even get a mention on the playbills.

²¹ Gye, 18 Oct. 1855.

²² *Examiner* (8 April 1832).

²³ *Examiner* (12 Feb. 1832). *Times* (7 March 1831).

²⁴ *Morning Post* (21 March 1834).

²⁵ *Athenaeum* (29 March 1834), 243.

²⁶ *Morning Chronicle* (24 June 1842).

²⁷ *Athenaeum* (29 June 1844), 604.

²⁸ *Times* (5 Oct. 1880).

Costa's concern to be recognised as a composer prompted him to publish many smaller works in the 1830s, often as commissions. Some have recently been recorded (Appendix D). Many are light occasional works for the female voice, possibly written for pupils. They are mainly written in the conventional Italian style, reflecting the strong influence of Mercadante, Rossini and Donizetti. But some, such as 'T'amai qual'aman gli angeli' (from *Don Carlos* - Fig. 9.1) and 'Ecco quel fiero istante' (Fig. 9.2) are well-written and harmonically interesting pieces that the Old Guard sang frequently at private concerts. 'Felice età dell'oro' was described as 'an exquisite composition of the Mozart school'.²⁹

Ecco quel fiero istante
Quartetto a Canone
eseguito dalle Sig.^{re} Pasta e Malibran e dai Sig.^{ri} Rubini e Tamburini
 COMPOSTO E DEDICATO A S.E.
Lord Burghersh
Dal Maestro Michele Costa
 N° 6833.
 Prezzo Fr. 2.
 ANDANTE
 sempre legato
 TENORE.
 E — co quel fie — ro i — stan — te
 ritardando
 a Tempo
 FIRENZE presso G. RICORDI e C.^o V. 6833 0 MILANO presso G. RICORDI dirimetto all'I.R. Teatro alla Scala.

Fig. 9.2 'Ecco quel fiero istante', quartet for Malibran, Pasta, Rubini and Tamburini (1833)

More ambitious were the pieces which he composed for the leading sopranos as concert arias or inserts into operas. Some of these are more than show-cases for vocal display.

An aria, 'Dall'asilo della pace', composed for the newly arrived Giulia Grisi to sing in

²⁹ *Morning Post* (17 June 1841).

Rossini's *Le siège de Corinthe* in 1834, shows an emotional power, orchestral colour and harmonic complexity more reminiscent of Mercadante than Rossini. The *Athenaeum* especially commended the opening section, a sonorous solo for cello, supported by lower strings.³⁰ Cox claimed that 'unlike most interpolations, [it] was exceedingly well adapted to the situation and met with an enthusiastic reception'.³¹ Costa's version was regularly included in London performances of this opera.

Another striking scena and aria, 'Suon profondo', was composed for Malibran in 1836, the last year of her life; it was also used by her sister Pauline Viardot's at her first London appearance in Rossini's *Otello*. As well as displaying the singer's remarkable virtuosity, this combines unusual and dark orchestration with highly-charged romanticism. A recent review describes it as a work of 'extraordinary technical resource and imagination'.³²

As he took on more responsibilities outside the opera house, Costa ceased to accept commissions and refused to compose fill-in pieces.³³ His main task of adaptation became that of cutting and writing recitatives for the non-Italian works that increasingly made up the repertoire, such as *Der Freischütz* and the Meyerbeer operas (Chapter 9.2). But, as he became a major figure in the musical Establishment, Costa also had to compose works for state occasions. Among these were a Grand Cantata *The Dream* for the wedding of the Princess Victoria to the Crown Prince of Prussia in 1858; a serenata, *Ethelburga*, for the wedding of the Prince of Wales in 1863; and a cantata *God preserve thee, Sultan long* for the Ottoman State Visit in 1867. These were handicapped by

³⁰ *Athenaeum* (14 June 1834), 458.

³¹ Cox, *Musical Recollections*, vol. 1, 297-8.

³² Jeremy Commons, Notes for Opera Rara CD, ORR 231.

³³ Gye, 2 April 1849.

hymn-like texts by his librettist, Bartholomew. None of them found a place in the repertoire.

9.1.4 Eli (1855)

After he took over the SHS, it was natural that Costa should try his hand at oratorio, which Mendelssohn had reinvigorated and which was becoming more popular as the choral movement boomed. There was an explosion of English oratorios: from 7-13 a decade in the early nineteenth-century to 20-30 in the period 1850-70 and over 50 in the 1880s.³⁴ *Eli*, based on the Old Testament story of the priest of Shiloh who trained the young prophet Samuel, had its premiere at the Birmingham Festival in August 1855. It was dedicated to Queen Victoria, who attended the first of four London performances. The *ILN* wrote that *Eli* was received ‘with demonstrations of enthusiasm in which the Exeter Hall audiences rarely indulge. This new oratorio is truly a *chef d’oeuvre*; and it has deservedly gained a place among the greatest works of its class’.³⁵ Chorley identified it as one of the three most significant musical events of the year.

It remained the most popular of Costa’s works. The piano version of the ‘March of the Israelites’ was one of the standard pieces on the Victorian family piano (Fig. 9.3). *Eli* was put on successfully in Boston and New York and later in Berlin, Melbourne and Stuttgart, where Costa conducted it in 1868.³⁶ In the mid-1860s, the *Times* saw it as a ‘modern’ work ‘of remarkable merit’ and Henry Davison later contrasted Costa’s ‘well written and highly respectable’ work with Jullien’s ‘pretentious and extravagant’ *Pietro il Grande*.³⁷ Through the 1870s, *Eli* enjoyed undiminished popularity: ‘the solos and

³⁴ Smither, *The Oratorio in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century*, vol. 4, 281-3.

³⁵ *ILN* (21 Feb. 1857), 161.

³⁶ *Athenaeum* (14 Nov. 1868), 651.

³⁷ *Times* (24 Aug. 1864) and Davison, *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*, 109.

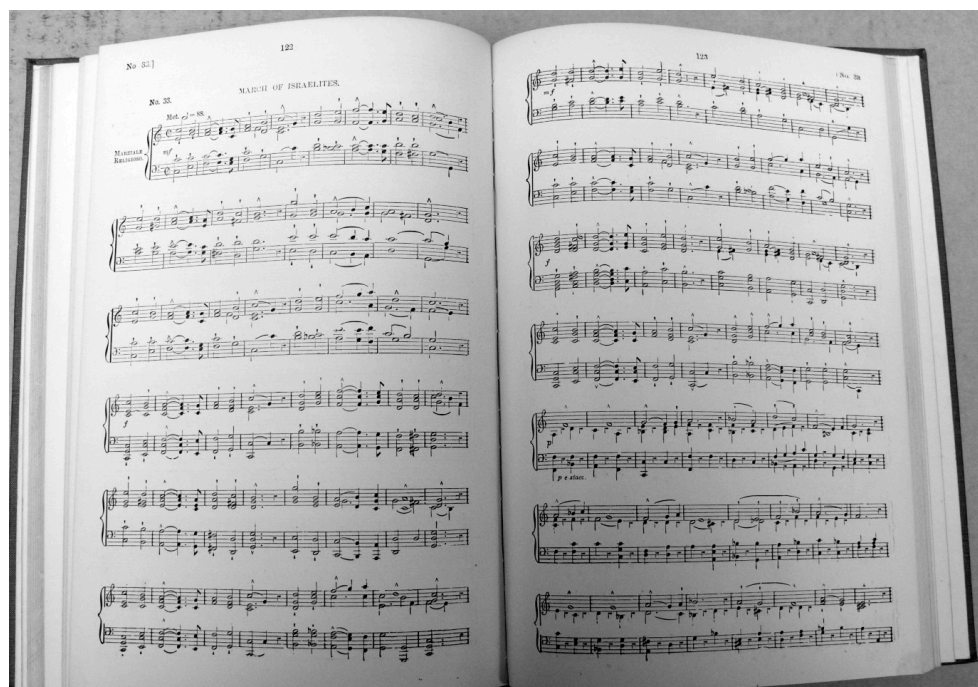


Fig. 9.3 'The March of the Israelites' from *Eli*.

concerted pieces of *Eli* are now to be heard in church and chapel and in most towns and cities where choral societies exist.'³⁸ Cox claimed that 'scarcely any other sacred work of modern times – not even save the *Elijah* of Mendelssohn – is received with greater warmth and affection'.³⁹ Chorley attributed its continuing popularity to the fact that 'The vocal parts are free, unconstrained and spontaneous, and are sustained by an orchestral undercurrent that is at once scientific and ear-haunting'.⁴⁰

Eli is a remarkable mélange of the church and the opera house, with some signs of the 'ripest and richest Italian melody' that Cox detected in it. Costa's semi-operatic writing falls between the competing notions, which occupied the music press in the 1850s, of oratorio as either a musical epic or a sacred drama. Nigel Burton detected an autobiographical clue within it: 'Costa's real self emerged against his will in the passages of refined early Verdi and Meyerbeer (with lavish use of the brass) but he

³⁸ *Athenaeum* (5 April 1879), 449.

³⁹ Cox, *Musical Recollections*, 296.

⁴⁰ *Athenaeum* (5 April 1879), 449.

constantly attempts to disguise it beneath a coat of applied Spohr and Mendelssohn in a naively touching effort to be reverent.⁴¹ It is perhaps no coincidence that Costa should have produced a pastiche of the composers who so dominated his middle career as a conductor.

9.1.5 Naaman (1865)

Between *Eli* and *Naaman*, a tightening of the conventions of the oratorio discouraged operatic effects.⁴² Costa wrote to Bartholomew: ‘you will see that it will be quite different in style and colouring from the other’. He reported that the first London outing of *Naaman* went well, despite the indisposition of Sims Reeves: ‘6 encores and a magnificent and noble Hall.’⁴³ *Naaman*, dedicated to the memory of Prince Albert, strengthened his claim to be the leading composer of oratorios in mid-Victorian England. It received the usual respectful press reviews and analyses. The *Orchestra* described a canonic quartet at the conclusion as ‘one of the most effective and exciting pieces ever written’ and detected ‘numerous unexpected modulations’.⁴⁴ Chorley, in several long reviews, noted that Costa had avoided the picturesque effects of harp and organ that he had used in *Eli*, relying instead on solidity of construction. The instrumentation was ‘rich without cumbrousness, diversified without eccentricity’, reminiscent of Cherubini (always a plus in Chorley’s lexicon). Overall Chorley thought *Naaman* a major advance on *Eli*. Costa had avoided theatricality and achieved pathos, dignity and a true sense of sorrow without perpetually reverting to minor keys. While

41 Nigel Burton, ‘Oratorios and Cantatas’ in ed. Nicholas Temperley, *The Romantic Age, 1800-1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 226.

42 H. Smither, *The Oratorio in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century*, 288-329.

43 Costa-Mrs Bartholomew (26 May 1865), RCMA 3034.

44 *The Orchestra* (6 and 13 May 1865).

most nineteenth-century oratorios quickly disappeared, *Naaman* ‘may, and we hope *will*, stand’.

But Chorley recognised that there were only a couple of moments of real originality. The rhythms were unadventurous and the tempi too square. Bartholomew’s pedestrian libretto illustrated events and situations rather than people.⁴⁵ Costa’s assurance that ‘I try to adapt the music to the words, and not the words to the music’ was not a formula liable to favour lyrical creativity.⁴⁶ It also suffered from the unfortunate subject and from the fact of being written for the voice of ‘one specially qualified singer’, Sims Reeves.⁴⁷ Stanford characterised it aptly as ‘an odd study of an open-air Italian trying to conform to the traditions of the stained-glass window’.⁴⁸ The *ILN* detected in it an increasing tendency towards the German school and the style of Handel and Mendelssohn. But this usually supportive critic added ‘we expect from his next work something better than he has yet been able to accomplish’, implying that Costa had not yet found his own voice.⁴⁹

There was no ‘next work’, though he was reported to be working on an oratorio about Joseph for the Birmingham Festival.⁵⁰ Costa evidently found the composition of *Naaman* arduous. He told Bartholomew that he had burnt an earlier draft and was starting ‘on a different plan’.⁵¹ He struggled to compose to an English libretto, relying on Walker’s Dictionary as a guide to pronunciation. He admitted that the ‘Triumphal

⁴⁵ *Athenaeum* (10 Sept. 1864), 345-6 and (17 Sept. 1864), 378.

⁴⁶ Costa-Bartholomew (16 Nov. 1863), RCMA 3016.

⁴⁷ *Athenaeum* (28 Nov. 1868), 723.

⁴⁸ Stanford, *Pages from an Unwritten Diary*, 109.

⁴⁹ *ILN* (28 Nov. 1868), 518.

⁵⁰ *Graphic* (30 Dec. 1876).

⁵¹ Costa-Bartholomew (8 Oct. 1854), RCMA 3006.

March' cost him 'a great deal of trouble', as did the scene of Naaman's dream.⁵² His travails are clear from an exasperated reply to Mrs Bartholomew, who asked for changes in the text he had already set to music: 'I cannot at this moment of labour and anxiety do it. I am quite worn out of fatigue and really if God does not help me I am doomed.'⁵³

For a couple of decades, *Eli* and *Naaman* filled the gap left by Mendelssohn's death in 1847 and the failure of native talent. As late as the 1890s, Kuhe described *Eli* as 'without doubt the most esteemed work of the kind written since Mendelssohn's *Elijah*'.⁵⁴ For some later historians, they are the only reference points for Costa.⁵⁵ Some critics believed that they had found in Costa the long-awaited 'English' successor to Mendelssohn who might resist the modernising trends coming from Germany. The *Musical Times* obituary stated that 'we look in vain among the successors of Mendelssohn for an oratorio which more nearly approaches the standard of *Elijah* than *Eli*'.⁵⁶ But when Costa was no longer there to promote his own works, they did not long survive the collapse of the SHS. Unlike *Eli*, *Naaman* did not export. Costa's semi-Italian oratorios did not satisfy the next generation, which was looking for works worthy of the 'English Musical Renaissance'.⁵⁷

⁵² Costa-Bartholomew (11 Dec. 1860 and 8 Dec. 1863), RCMA 3010 and 3017.

⁵³ Costa-Bartholomew (26 May 1865), RCMA 3044.

⁵⁴ Kuhe, *Musical Recollections*, 56.

⁵⁵ Alfred Einstein, *Music in the Romantic Era* (London: Dent, 1947), 178. John Caldwell described *Eli* as 'a solitary masterpiece much overlaid with Italian operatic idioms'. *The Oxford History*, vol. 2, 219.

⁵⁶ *Musical Times*, (1 June 1884), 321-3.

⁵⁷ Meirion Hughes and Robert Stradling, *The English Musical Renaissance and the Press 1840-1940* (Manchester University Press, 2001).

Costa's career as a composer illustrated the growing pressure on musicians to specialise and the difficulty of combining the professions of composer and conductor. As Mendelssohn complained, 'Two months of constant conducting takes more out of me than two years of composing all day long'.⁵⁸ Kastner decreed that composer and conductor were different and even incompatible roles.⁵⁹ Although Stanford was later successful as composer-conductor, no one in the middle decades of the century managed to combined composing with the frantic operatic, choral and concert schedules that Costa worked. But overwork is not the sole explanation of his failure. Several other factors were at work.

The prime task of the new professional conductor was not to compose but to give well-prepared performances of the works of others. As Chorley perceptively observed, Costa was 'bathed...in other people's music from January to December'. Such a taxing life was 'hardly to be braved and conquered by the strongest of mortals without some loss of fancy'.⁶⁰ Costa hinted at this when answering a complaint from the wife of his librettist: 'You must not quote Mendelssohn, he had nothing to do but compose music, but I am dead with fatigue and anxiety.'⁶¹

His undoubted success as a professional conductor may have reduced his hunger for success as a composer, to which he devoted progressively less time after *Don Carlos*. His complaint of composer's block during the writing of *Naaman* suggests that he lacked the melodic powers that enabled some of Balfe's melodies to survive on the edge of the repertoire. It is significant that he eventually dropped 'Musical Composer' from

⁵⁸ Mendelssohn-Hiller (10 Dec. 1837), ed. Elek, *Letters*, 74.

⁵⁹ G Kastner, Supplement to *Cours d'Instrumentation*, 15.

⁶⁰ *Athenaeum* (27 May 1837), 388.

⁶¹ Costa-Bartholomew (26 May 1865), RCMA 3044.

his title, describing himself in the 1881 census simply as ‘Knight and Professor of Music’. Given his creative limitations, Costa seems to have realised that, in devoting most of his energies to conducting, he had chosen the profession best suited to his personality and talent.

It is not the contention of this thesis that Costa’s *oeuvre* cries out for revival. His importance clearly does not lie in his compositions. He was one of the hundreds of composers who could write successfully in the received style of their day but lacked the originality and melodic flair that are among the ingredients of lasting success. One reason why his compositions have been almost totally neglected is that his late works, especially *Naaman* and the state cantatas, were in a late-Mendelssohnian style that was already being superseded. But some of Costa’s earlier works are well-crafted and show that he had moved well beyond the style of Rossini. This applies especially to his occasional pieces for Malibran and the Old Guard (the trio ‘Vanne a colei che adoro’ and the quartet ‘Ecco quel fiero istante’) and some of his operatic substitutions (‘Dall’asilo della pace’ and ‘Suon profondo’). In an age that has been enriched by the excavation of many neglected works, there is also a case for another look at Costa’s two operas and his semi-operatic *Eli*.

9.2 Re-arrangement

Costa’s career spanned a fundamental change of attitude towards the treatment of musical compositions. In 1830, creative re-arrangement of scores was common and was often done by the composers themselves. Spohr, for example, adapted his *Faust* for performance in London in 1852 to accommodate the two-act format and provide a display piece for Castellan. Music from earlier periods needed to be adjusted to the expanded orchestra, the wider palette of instruments, the disappearance of the basso

continuo and the trend to larger concert halls. The Musical Director's task was thus increasingly to re-arrange rather than to compose new works. Nowhere was music more thoroughly adapted than in London, though Berlioz regularly lamented its prevalence in Paris. Adaptation took four forms: abbreviation, pastiche, substitution and re-orchestration.

9.2.1 Abbreviation

Abbreviation was essential to reduce oratorios and operas to the three hours that were the norm for a London performance. Davison commended such cuts as 'judicious...Five hours of music at a sitting is too much for any but a French audience'.⁶² Cutting was also necessary to cover gaps in the cast; to remove 'offensive' scenes (such as the murders in *Les Huguenots*); or to squeeze in a double bill in order to show off the stars. As late as 1849, Covent Garden put on Auber's *Masaniello* with *Lucrezia Borgia* in a single programme.⁶³ But double bills were going out of fashion. By 1852, the *Musical World* noted that Covent Garden had 'gained a reputation for giving the works of celebrated composers as they were written'.⁶⁴ The return to original scoring became an important claim on Costa's time (9.2.4 below).

It is hard to assess the validity of some of the criticisms levelled against Costa in this field. In 1870 he was accused of the 'mutilation' of *Guillaume Tell*, but Gruneisen claimed that Costa's cuts and new finale had been 'submitted to Rossini himself and met with his entire approval'.⁶⁵ The *Pall Mall Gazette*, which attacked his cuts to

⁶² *Times* (14 May 1849). See also *Times* (10 March 1848) on *Tancredi*; *Athenaeum* (13 July 1839), 525 on *Guillaume Tell*; and *ILN* (29 July 1865), 86 on *L'Africaine*.

⁶³ ROHC, (19 May 1849), MAR/POS/2248.

⁶⁴ *MW* (3 April 1852), 215.

⁶⁵ *Graphic* (16 April 1870).

L'Africaine, later conceded that they were 'absolutely necessary'.⁶⁶ He was criticised for cutting Verdi's *Don Carlos* and Wagner's *Lohengrin*.⁶⁷ But these operas would not have been performable in London without shortening. Even the cut version of *Don Carlos* was 'too long for our audience' and several of Costa's cuts were adopted when Verdi revised the opera in 1883.⁶⁸

The most conspicuous cutting was needed for Meyerbeer's 5-act grand operas. According to Cox, Costa worked closely with Meyerbeer to adapt *Robert le diable*, which lasted until 12.45 despite being cut by a third. Meyerbeer clearly endorsed Costa's heavy cuts to *L'Etoile du nord*, since he joined Costa for the curtain applause.⁶⁹ Davison commented that 'Mr Costa is an experienced hand at curtailment, or Meyerbeer would not have authorised him to 'cut' *The Huguenots* at discretion'⁷⁰ But Cox and Gruneisen were probably exaggerating when they claimed that Meyerbeer allowed him free rein in cutting *Les Huguenots*.⁷¹ Dideriksen argues convincingly that Meyerbeer exercised tight control over the changes for the Covent Garden revival.⁷²

Abbreviating Handel's oratorios, already a common practice at the Ancient Concerts, became even more necessary as the SHS began, under Costa, to perform oratorios *in toto*. Costa was commended for his 'judgement and discretion' in cutting one hour in 'the most complete and satisfactory' performance of *Judas Maccabeus* in 1849.⁷³ The

⁶⁶ *Pall Mall Gazette* (6 July and 5 Aug. 1865).

⁶⁷ *Musical Times* (1875) quoted in Scholes, *Mirror of Music*, 253. *Examiner* (26 July 1879).

⁶⁸ Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1992), vol. 3, 27. *Pall Mall Gazette* (26 June 1867).

⁶⁹ *Daily News* (23 July 1855).

⁷⁰ *Times* (14 May 1849).

⁷¹ Cox, *Musical Recollections*, 219. Gruneisen, *Memoir of Meyerbeer* (London: Brettell, 1848), 22.

⁷² For a detailed analysis see Dideriksen, 301-31.

⁷³ *Times* (10 Jan. 1849).

Times argued that it was right to reduce the ‘excessive quantity of recitatives and airs’ that Handel had written only to satisfy ‘the jealousies and caprices of contemporary singers’.⁷⁴ The posthumous complaint against Costa was not that he cut Handel’s oratorios but that he re-orchestrated them (see 9.2.4).

9.2.2 Pastiche

Pastiche (strictly an opera based on ‘the works of various masters’⁷⁵) was practised across Europe.⁷⁶ In London, operas (and plays) were frequently cannibalised to appeal to English taste. Until 1843, the lesser theatres had an incentive to do this because they were not permitted to stage complete operas. There were eight pastiche productions of *Der Freischütz* in 1824. This practice encouraged the two patent theatres and the Italian Opera to go down the same route.

The leading London exponent of pastiche was Henry Bishop, fancifully named ‘the English Mozart’ and carrying the prestige of a knighthood for his own compositions and his surgery on imported operas. The King’s Theatre announced a production of *Le nozze di Figaro*: ‘The Overture and Music selected chiefly from Mozart’s Operas – the new music by Mr Bishop.’⁷⁷ His rewrite of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* was justified by the leading London musical journal as giving:

as much of the music as should be preserved in an English dress. The interstices [were] filled – and ably filled – with compositions of his own or with selections from Paesello. Mr Bishop has rejected Rossini’s overture and substituted his own.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ *Times* (27 May 1850).

⁷⁵ Busby, *Complete Dictionary*, 1840 edition, under ‘pasticcio’.

⁷⁶ Berlioz, *Memoirs*, 87 and 89.

⁷⁷ Playbill for 2 Oct. 1829, V&A.

⁷⁸ *QMMR* (vol. 11, no. V), 74.

Such mutilation, which is considered indefensible in today's museum culture, was essential to the economics of the London theatres, where the opportunity for novelty and vocal display mattered more than coherence of plot. Costa's predecessor at the King's Theatre, Bochsa, rearranged Beethoven's Symphony no. 3 for a ballet and included in his *I Messicani* (1829) music by Beethoven, Rossini, Pacini, Donizetti and others.⁷⁹ Costa was initially required to continue this practice, contributing in 1832 to a hybrid production of Donizetti's *L'esule di Roma*, billed as 'a *pasticcio* by Donizetti, Costa, Pacini and Monck Mason' (Fig. 9.4). The next year, a critic who detected 'some patchwork' in a production of *Mathilde de Shabran* added that it was done so skilfully that he was 'content not to object'.⁸⁰

But tastes were changing. After the Drury Lane adaptation of *La sonnambula* in 1833, Bellini wrote home 'I can't find words to tell you how my poor music was murdered and hacked about...by those **** Englishmen'.⁸¹ The *Athenaeum* critic objected to 'this system of Pasticcio...it is only to be tolerated when a composition by the same author can be introduced, of a character corresponding to the scene.'⁸² In 1845, Davison attacked Bishop's 'temerity in changing, adding to or otherwise transmogrifying music committed to his care...'⁸³ Christina Fuhrmann makes a persuasive case that the 'Englished' *Der Freischütz* of 1824 led to a more respectful attitude to foreign imports and a wave of 'continentalised' English operas based on works by Weber, Spohr and

⁷⁹ *Times* (18 March 29).

⁸⁰ *Athenaeum* (9 March 1833), 156.

⁸¹ Bellini-Florimo, ed. Florimo, *Bellini: Memorie e Lettere* (Florence: 1882), 137, quoted in Galatopoulos, *Bellini*, 289.

⁸² *Athenaeum* (11 Feb. 1832), 100.

⁸³ Davison, *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*, 15. *Athenaeum* (22 Feb. 1845), 204. Hogarth *Memoires of the Opera*, 368.

especially Meyerbeer.⁸⁴ These works did not lend themselves to pastiche, which ceased from the mid-1830s to be one of Costa's tasks.

9.2.3 Substitution

Substitution was an important part of the Musical Director's job. In some cases, for example the music lesson in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, it was normal to import favourite arias. It was often felt acceptable to import arias by other hands, as when Mario included an aria from Pacini's *Amazilia* in *La donna del lago* in 1850.⁸⁵ Singers too could be substituted, as when a bass sang the soprano part of Pippo in *La Gazza Ladra*.⁸⁶



Fig. 9.4 Costa's aria inserted into Donizetti's *L'esule di Roma*.

Costa catered to the demand frequently in his first years at the King's Theatre (Chapter 9.1 and Appendix D). His insert aria, 'Dall'asilo della pace', composed for Grisi to insert into *Le siège de Corinthe* in 1834, was almost enough to silence the *Morning*

84 Christina Fuhrmann, 'Continental Opera Englished, English Opera Continentalised, *Der Freischütz* in London, 1824' in *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), vol. 1/1, 115-142.

85 Elizabeth Forbes, *Grisi and Mario* (London: Gollancz, 1985), 110.

86 *Morning Post* (28 March 1836).

Post's objections to this practice.⁸⁷ But these habits were challenged, especially in the case of Mozart's operas, by the emergence of a canon of operatic works and by the new aesthetic that, in theory at least, treated operas as artistic entities.⁸⁸ In 1833, the *Athenaeum* expressed the hope that Costa would respect Mozart and give *Le nozze di Figaro* 'without any mutilation'.⁸⁹ Interpolation, like ornamentation, became rarer, increasingly confined by a limited 'canon of substitution'.⁹⁰ Meyerbeer objected strongly when Jenny Lind inserted an aria from *Ein Feldlager in Schlesien* into *Il barbiere di Siviglia* in 1847.⁹¹

As with pastiche and abbreviation, substitution ceased to be a significant part of Costa's role. What remained prevalent and controversial – and damaging for Costa's later reputation – was the matter of re-orchestration.

9.2.4 Re-orchestration

Opera

There was across Europe a long tradition, sanctioned by composers themselves, of altering the orchestration in order to 'make do' with whatever instruments were available. Re-scoring was further stimulated by the shortage of reliable performing editions and the availability of a wider range of instruments, especially trombones, ophicleides and percussion. In addition, the requirement that the Italian Opera houses should perform only in Italian obliged Costa to orchestrate Italian recitatives for the increasing number of French and German operas in their repertoire. Costa's recitatives

⁸⁷ *Morning Post* (8 June 1834).

⁸⁸ Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts*, 48.

⁸⁹ *Athenaeum* (25 May 1833), 332 and (16 March 1833), 172.

⁹⁰ Hilary Poriss, 'A Madwoman's Choice', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 13/1 (2001), 5.

⁹¹ Meyerbeer-Lind (24 July 1847), Becker, *A Life in Letters*, 116.

for *Der Freischütz* were described by the purist Chorley as ‘excellently adjusted’; the *ILN* felt that he had ‘thoroughly seized the Weberian spirit’.⁹² Composing recitatives remained a necessary part of Costa’s duties as late as 1872, when he was praised for doing so ‘in irreproachable style’ for Cherubini’s *Les deux journées*.⁹³

Such up-dating was widely seen as an act of homage and a sign of progress. Monck Mason boasted in his 1832 prospectus that he had ‘replenished’ many older operas to make ‘more fit for dramatic presentation...the works of masters who lived when the modern improvements were unknown and who, for a certainty, would have availed themselves of their powerful assistance had they then existed’.⁹⁴ Even pedants like Davison approved when Costa ‘judiciously re-instrumented several pieces and added accompaniments to the recitatives’ of *Tancredi*, because Rossini had scored it for a small band and Costa had done so with ‘the hand of a thorough musician’.⁹⁵

But there was growing criticism from the cognoscenti of ‘musical adultery’, especially when the works of Mozart and Beethoven were re-orchestrated.⁹⁶ Ella noted that Costa was much censured for adding a side drum and cymbals to *Don Giovanni* in 1836.⁹⁷ Chorley accused him of ‘tricking [Mozart] out in the costume of the day’.⁹⁸ But Chorley’s charge – and the many encores demanded – showed that adding new instruments was still seen by most as ‘the costume of the day’.

⁹² Chorley, *Musical Recollections*, 281. *ILN* (30 March 1850), 190.

⁹³ *Graphic* (29 June 1872).

⁹⁴ *Times* (1 Sept. 1831).

⁹⁵ *Times* (10 March 1848).

⁹⁶ *Morning Post* (2 Sept. 1858 and 14 May 1860).

⁹⁷ Ella Diary, 20 June 1836.

⁹⁸ *Athenaeum* (25 June 1836), 451.

For progressive taste, Costa was undoubtedly too free with the heavy artillery, as when he used an ophicleide to accompany Marcellina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* or added a bass drum and cymbals to the finale of *Il nozze di Figaro*. The most damaging criticism came from Berlioz, who accused him of presuming to give Mozart, Beethoven, Rossini and Weber lessons in orchestration and described the practice of adding modern instruments as ‘the Costa tradition’.⁹⁹ But Berlioz admitted that his friend Balfe was also guilty (as were Habeneck and other conductors in Paris). His much-quoted comparison between a ‘trombonised, ophicleided’ *Don Giovanni* and ‘slapping a trowelful of mortar on a painting by Raphael’ probably referred not to Costa (as Barzun assumed) but to Balfe’s 1850 production at Her Majesty’s.¹⁰⁰

Although Costa, like most of his contemporaries, felt free to add new instrumentation, his record at the opera was, by the standards of the times, relatively clean. A growing respect for the intentions of the composer is apparent in his reintroduction of the original versions of Rossini’s *La gazza ladra*, *La Cenerentola* and *Semiramide*.¹⁰¹

Covent Garden’s 1847 version of Donizetti’s *Maria di Rohan* contained updatings that Costa appears to have obtained from Donizetti in Paris before the latter’s final illness. The rescoring of *Les Huguenots*, adding bass drum, cymbals and ophicleide, was carried out with Meyerbeer’s close involvement.¹⁰² His production of *Le nozze di Figaro* in the same year was praised for the completeness of the score and for showing ‘the deepest reverence for the composer’ – in contrast to the ‘shameful mutilations’ carried out at

99 *Feuilleton du Journal des Débats* (1 July 1851); and *Soirées d’Orchestre*, 2nd Epilogue, Act 2. Omitted from the book re-published in 1854.

100 Barzun, *Berlioz and his Century* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1956), 280. c/f *Feuilleton du Journal des Débats* (1 July 1851).

101 *MW* (10 April 1847), 236-8. *Morning Chronicle* (3 May 1848).

102 Dideriksen, 303.

Her Majesty's'.¹⁰³ In 1851, Berlioz commended him for restoring the triple orchestra in *Don Giovanni* and for refraining from adding to Mozart's score in his finished and precise performance of *Die Zauberflöte*.¹⁰⁴ In the same year, Costa refused to adapt *Don Giovanni*, with a tenor Don (Mario) and a baritone Leporello (Ronconi), thus offending Gye, who had to obtain a 'slashing' adaptation from Alary in Paris.¹⁰⁵

Symphonic

Re-orchestrating symphonic works was more controversial. Shaw, writing in the 1870s, believed that any liberties with the orchestral classics were 'grave breaches of musical taste'. He accused Costa of 'presumptuously' adding trombones to Beethoven's symphonies.¹⁰⁶ Shaw reflected a growing tendency to treat 'absolute' orchestral music as sacrosanct, especially the scores of Beethoven, who 'had at his command...all the resources of a modern orchestra'.¹⁰⁷ By 1870, this concept had hardened into the notion of a canon of great orchestral works – starting with those of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. The main features of this change were the aesthetic shift from viewing music as part of an *event* to treating it as a finished autonomous *work*; the publication of Urtext editions; and the writing of more detailed dynamic markings in new scores. In this evolving ideology of a museum of musical art-works, a special responsibility fell to professional conductors.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ *Times* (26 Aug. 1850). 'Reverence' in *MW* (31 July 1847), 492-3. *Athenaeum* (31 July 1847), 821. *ILN* (29 May 1847), 349.

¹⁰⁴ *Feuilleton du Journal des Débats* (1 July 1851 and 12 Aug. 1851).

¹⁰⁵ Gye, 6 May 1851.

¹⁰⁶ *Shaw's Music*, vol. 1, 169.

¹⁰⁷ *Morning Post* (25 May 1847).

¹⁰⁸ Berlioz, Supplement to *Traité*, 245. For the philosophical context, see Goehr, *Imaginary Musical Museum*.

In the England of the 1830s, however, these ideas were still embryonic. Most musicians believed that it was legitimate to enrich great scores from the past according to what Berlioz described as ‘the spirit of the author’s intentions’. This argument was invoked to justify re-scoring when practised by Wagner (on *Don Giovanni*), Liszt (on Schubert’s C Major Fantasy) and Mendelssohn (on Bach). But there was a latent contradiction between fidelity to the score and the pretension of conductors to unravel the composer’s concealed meanings. Wagner and Berlioz sought to resolve this contradiction by laying down that tinkering with other composers’ works should be restricted to those, like themselves, who were in communion with the canonical musicians of the past. In the aesthetic mood of the 1860-70s, Costa and most other conductors offended both doctrines: they sought to interpret scores literally and, when they dared to update the orchestration, they were judged to be apostolically unqualified.

Against this background, it is difficult to form a judgement of Costa’s practice that takes account of the historical context. In 1837, nine years before Costa joined the Philharmonic, its orchestra already had trombones, trumpets, drums and an ophicleide. Even the purist Berlioz conceded that, since the players were available, there was an incentive to use them.¹⁰⁹ Costa, like others, was criticised by some writers for adding trombones, and sometimes, ophicleides to orchestral works; but this was not seen during his years with the Philharmonic as a sign that he was out of sympathy with German symphonic music. When he retired from the Philharmonic, the *Musical World* wrote that he was now on ‘Hail fellow! Well met!’ terms with the Teutons.¹¹⁰

Costa’s comparatively correct treatment of the symphonic repertoire fits with his reluctance to impose his own interpretations or to permit ‘vainglorious impromptu

¹⁰⁹ Berlioz, *Soirées d’Orchestre*, 2nd Epilogue, Act 2.

¹¹⁰ *MW* (27 Jan. 1855), 56.

cadenzas' in the National Anthem.¹¹¹ He was noted for refusing encores: a typical report describes how in *Lucrezia Borgia* 'with a true instinct of propriety, [he] would not allow the dramatic action to be arrested.'¹¹² What harmed his later reputation was not his liberties with symphonic scores but his heavy re-orchestration of the choral repertoire.

Choral

Re-orchestration of oratorios had the sanction of Mozart, whose version of *Messiah* was still widely performed. This was encouraged by the absence of reliable performing editions and by the 'baldness' of some surviving scores that Handel had himself filled out from the organ.¹¹³ As late as 1883, when Grove suggested that *Messiah* should be performed as Handel wrote it, the *Times* commented that this would be 'as impossible as to rebuild Westminster Abbey on the lines laid down by the first architect'.¹¹⁴ One critic expressed the conventional view that 'Handel unadapted is now Handel unpresentable.'¹¹⁵ It was plausibly argued that reinforcing the instrumentation was 'what Handel would probably have added, had he had at his command the Society's present orchestral and vocal strength'. Handel, after all, embellished *Saul* when a carillon and trombones were available.¹¹⁶ Audiences saw amplitude as one aspect of the Sublime, which was especially associated with Handel's oratorios. In 1843 the *Examiner* asked 'Who ever heard of a choir too large for Handel? Here the physical capacity of the ear is the only limit to the desires of the mind'.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ Ella, *Musical Sketches*, 328.

¹¹² *Times* (17 April 1871).

¹¹³ *Morning Chronicle* (3 Sept. 1858) and *Daily News* (26 Nov. 1853).

¹¹⁴ *Times* (20 April 1883).

¹¹⁵ *Pall Mall Gazette* (11 April 1870).

¹¹⁶ *Musical Times* (Feb. 1, 1849), 109-10. Grove 2, vol. 10, 775.

¹¹⁷ *Examiner* (1843), 343.

In this climate, Costa felt free to make radical additions to Handel and Bach (though not Mendelssohn). Costa's personal copies of Bach's cantatas no. 34 and 50 contained additional parts for flutes, bassoons, clarinets, horns and timpani.¹¹⁸ The extant SHS score of *Saul* has additional staves for piccolo, flute, clarinet, bassoon, contra-bassoon, trombone (bass and tenor), cornet, ophicleide, double bass, drum and bass drum (Fig. 9.5). It is hard to find anyone who criticised this practice in the mid-nineteenth-century. His additions were commended for having 'nourished Handel's scores, so as to strengthen them and fill out the orchestral portion of them...' ¹¹⁹ The *ILN*

Fig. 9.5 Costa's score of Handel's *Saul*.

118 Breitel and Hartl edition (Leipzig: 1853/81), BL I.475.o.

120 *ILN* (15 March 1851), 474.

performance of *Acis and Galatea*, complete with ophicleide, was more suitable than Mozart's 'too delicate' version; it was 'nowhere intrusive, in nowise contradictory of the design but completing it for performance on a scale of which its maker never dreamed'.¹²¹ His additions were seen as redeeming scores that would not otherwise be performable. William Spark wrote that a performance of Handel's *Occasional Oratorio* at the Crystal Palace succeeded only thanks to 'Costa's skilful additional instrumentation'.¹²² Another rescoring which was widely approved was the use of violas and cellos for recitatives, in place of the 'displeasing scrape of a single violincello and a double bass'.¹²³

Paradoxically Costa was also commended for his restraint in making the minimum changes necessary to adapt Handel to modern taste, drawing on the composer's scores in the Royal Library. The *ILN* commented approvingly that *Israel in Egypt* had been given 'in its integrity without the interpolations of any musical meddler', with 'additional accompaniments by Costa being added but in rare instances'. The *Times* claimed that it was given 'precisely after Handel's score'.¹²⁴ At the Handel Festivals, he was congratulated for refusing to 'cook' a work to make it palatable to popular taste.¹²⁵ It was on the strength of such 'authenticity' that Novello purchased Costa's performing editions shortly before his death.¹²⁶ This was in line with the success of his heavy version of the National Anthem that remained in official favour well into the next century. Younger conductors, such as Halle, also performed Handel with 'additional

¹²¹ *Athenaeum* (4 Sept. 1858), 305.

¹²² Spark, *Musical Reminiscences Past and Present* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton and Kent, 1892), 43.

¹²³ *Morning Post* (29 Aug. 1869).

¹²⁴ *ILN* (16 Feb. 1850), 13. *Times* (27 May 1850).

¹²⁵ *ILN* (27 July 1857), 640.

¹²⁶ *Musical Times* (Jan. 1884), cited in Scholes, *Mirror of Music*, 68.

accompaniments' (including the ophicleide), as well as drawing on their enlarged orchestras for the symphonies of Mozart and Beethoven.¹²⁷ Manns continued the Handel Festival on its gargantuan scale for 18 years after Costa's death.

As the reaction against mid-Victorian practices gathered force, Costa became the main focus of criticism for the embellishment of Handel and Bach. By the time of his death, his earlier supporters were describing his additions as 'quite indefensible' (*Musical Times*) and his approach as 'imperfect' (Joseph Bennett).¹²⁸ The mild *ILN*, which had been an enthusiastic advocate of his choral arrangements, objected in 1870 that his additions to *Solomon* were 'conspicuous'.¹²⁹ When Costa transposed Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* to meet the practical problem of the SHS's high pitch in 1861, the *Times* commended him, but by 1870 even the *ILN* saw it as sacrilege.¹³⁰ The *Times* obituary objected to his additions and alterations on 'the principle of the inviolability of a composer's purpose', unconscious that no such principle had tinged the paper's favourable reviews 30 years earlier.¹³¹ By the time of Grove 3 (1926), its editor Colles listed the standard Handel editions with the significant caveat that 'Costa's accompaniments, generally superseded now, are only mentioned where no other edition is available'. Here as elsewhere, Costa both reflected his period and then outlived it.

It is fair to conclude that, partly because of his dominant position, Costa attracted an undue share of blame for attitudes that were widespread in the early years of his career. He was involved only briefly in the fading fashions of pastiche or substitution. He

¹²⁷ Robert Beale, *Charles Halle, a Musical Life* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 64. Ophicleide in Nettel, *The Orchestra in England*, 168.

¹²⁸ Bennett, *Forty Years*, 50.

¹²⁹ *ILN* (16 April 1870), 399.

¹³⁰ *Times* (31 Aug. 1861). 'a large sacrifice of the composer's intention' *ILN* (2 April 1870), 355.

¹³¹ *Times* (30 April 1884).

continued, with virtually all of his contemporaries, the practice of abbreviating operas and oratorios. On the principal charge of re-orchestration, his record in the opera house and the concert hall became, by the standards of the period, comparatively restrained. His notoriety for tampering was based largely on the Victorianisation of Handel at the SHS and the Festivals, which was widely considered a necessary improvement and was seen at the time as one of his – and England's – greatest achievements.

9.3 Repertory

Any discussion of Costa's influence on the opera and concert repertory needs to address his notorious reluctance to conduct new works. Costa not only refused to take on new works by composers for whom he felt personal distaste (Sterndale Bennett) or contempt (Jullien); he specified in his Covent Garden contract that he was not obliged to conduct any new works except by Spohr and Meyerbeer (Appendix A). Gye understandably found this attitude incomprehensible.¹³²

One obvious explanation is that, along with most of his contemporaries, he felt an aesthetic distaste for much modern music.¹³³ But his caution extended beyond 'progressive' music. The composer John Francis Barnett attributed this to Costa's wish to avoid a repeat of the misunderstanding over Sterndale Bennett's (far from 'advanced') *Parisina* in 1848 (Chapter 8). His stance seems also to have been founded in part on considerations of practicality. Costa knew from experience how much effort was involved in mounting new works. He told Walter Macfarren, that 'Few people know what it is to have to get up and direct the first performance of an entirely new work.'¹³⁴ George Hogarth reckoned that Costa's responsibilities for the Philharmonic,

¹³² ROHC, Gye-Costa corr. (14 Jan. 1869).

¹³³ Bennett, *Life of Bennett*, 52; Stanford, *Pages from an Unwritten Diary*, 173, 206 and 142. For more evidence see Chapter 9.4.

¹³⁴ Macfarren, *Memories: an Autobiography*, 153.

the SHS, opera and private concerts left him ‘physically unable to give that time and attention to the production of new works which they absolutely require’.¹³⁵ The adaptation of Meyerbeer’s operas for London required not only lengthy rehearsal but also much rewriting, not least of recitatives. His preparation of unfinished works like Mendelssohn’s *Christus* or Balfe’s *Talismano* and of little known Handel oratorios added to a conducting burden heavier than that of any of his contemporaries.

Costa’s attitude to the repertoire needs to be set in the context of the profound conservatism of most of the English musical audience and critics, who demanded novelty but in practice objected to new works.¹³⁶ Even musically literate figures had difficulty with the new music of the 1850s. Grove wrote that ‘the modern school of Liszt and Tausig is hateful to them [RCM teachers] and to me’.¹³⁷ Stanford said that ‘Sterndale Bennett...was wholly out of sympathy with any music since that of his close friend Mendelssohn.’¹³⁸ George Eliot wrote from Italy to her husband: ‘We have seen *Il Trovatore* or heard it bawled (2 acts of it) and *L’assedio di Firenze* by Bottesini...we have heard it all before and do not desire to hear it again.’¹³⁹

English conservatism was a common theme among foreign observers, as in Clara Schumann’s comment: ‘They are dreadfully behind the times...They will not hear of any of the newer composers except Mendelssohn who is their God’.¹⁴⁰ Mendelssohn’s Leipzig showed a similar trend towards conservatism: contemporary works, which

¹³⁵ *ILN* (27 Aug. 1853), 170.

¹³⁶ There are good analyses in Temperley, ‘Xenophilia in British Musical History’, 3-19; and Weber, *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste*.

¹³⁷ Grove-Edith Oldham (17 Oct. 1889), Young, *George Grove*, 205.

¹³⁸ Stanford, *Pages from an Unwritten Diary*, 138.

¹³⁹ George Eliot-C.L. Lewis (17 May 1861), Haight, *Letters*, vol. 3, 413-6.

¹⁴⁰ Clara Schumann’s diary, quoted by Chissell, *Clara Schumann*, 136.

made up 84% of the programme in the late eighteenth century, fell to 38% in 1855 and 24% in 1870.¹⁴¹ William Weber rightly cautions against the simplistic explanation that the audience shifted as aristocratic connoisseurs gave way to middle class conservatives.¹⁴² But it is reasonable to assume that newcomers to the concert hall placed a premium on familiar works and styles, especially as the repertoire became more complex. As Arditi observed, audiences wanted assurance that the music they were paying to hear had the seal of approval, especially from abroad.¹⁴³

This market pressure, reinforced by most of the singers and critics, inevitably affected the managers. Lumley professed that it was their duty as well as policy ‘to bring forward the greatest novelty of the day’.¹⁴⁴ But, as Ringel has demonstrated in the case of Covent Garden, they were in practice driven mainly by non-musical considerations, such as the availability of particular singers, timing within the season, the tactics of the opposition, and the copyright cost of staging new works.¹⁴⁵ Painful experience convinced them that novelties (and revivals of neglected works) were unrewarding. Similar considerations reinforced the caution of concert programmes.

9.3.1 Operatic

It would be a mistake to draw a stark contrast in the mid-nineteenth-century between the ‘operatic’ and the ‘orchestral’ repertoire. Although the music world was fragmenting into different genres and venues, there was still a great deal of overlap. Costa’s opera concerts offered an increasing amount of orchestral music, while about 30% of the

¹⁴¹ Weber, ‘The Rise of the Classical Repertoire’, 376.

¹⁴² Weber, *Music and the Middle Class*, 8-10; see also Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts*, 8-12.

¹⁴³ Arditi, *Reminiscences*, 124.

¹⁴⁴ Lumley, *Reminiscences*, 103.

¹⁴⁵ Ringel, 123 and 209-224.

Philharmonic's programme consisted of vocal works (Appendix E.1). By bringing into the Philharmonic vocal performances that he had already polished in the opera house and the SHS, Costa helped to gain for the opera and oratorio some of the canonic respectability that already attached to the classical orchestral repertoire.¹⁴⁶ This melding of repertoires did not long survive as the music industry became increasingly specialised. But it is an important aspect of the context in which the careers of Costa and his contemporaries need to be assessed.

The context of Costa's career in the opera house was a stagnating repertoire. This was reflected in the diminishing proportion of contemporary works performed at Her Majesty's Theatre: from four per season in the 1820s to two in the 1840s. In the 1860s and 70s, Gye and Mapleson averaged fewer than two new operas a year (Appendix E). There was also a growing concentration on 'war-horses', with each house devoting a third of its performances to only five operas.¹⁴⁷ This phenomenon was also largely true of Paris, reflecting a decline in the number of operas exported within Europe: from about 28 in the 1830s to only nine in the 1860s and eight in the 1870s.¹⁴⁸

Dideriksen speculates that Gye was the first English manager to follow a policy of creating a 'canon of operatic works'.¹⁴⁹ But the evidence of his diary suggests that, insofar as he had a conscious agenda, it was to cleave to a repertoire that was familiar, safe and profitable – a caution underlined by the failure of novel works like Berlioz's *Benvenuto Cellini* (1853) and Costa's *Don Carlos*. Managerial caution was further

¹⁴⁶ I am indebted to Professor Weber for this observation.

¹⁴⁷ *Faust*, *Don Giovanni*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Guillaume Tell* and *Les Huguenots* at Covent Garden; and *Faust*, *Les Huguenots*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Il trovatore* and *Lucrezia Borgia* at Her Majesty's Theatre. In addition, *Martha*, *Norma*, *Rigoletto* and *La traviata* took up a substantial share of the repertory. Ringel, 60.

¹⁴⁸ The process of repertoire stagnation is well discussed by Ringel, 10 and 71.

¹⁴⁹ Dideriksen, 191.

reinforced by the increasing proportion of non-subscribers in the audience, which favoured the repetition of old favourites. This helps to explain the increasing age of the operas presented, from 14 years (1826) to 27 (1860); and Covent Garden's heavy concentration on Meyerbeer (228 performances in 1847-55), Donizetti (185), Rossini (172), Bellini (98), Mozart (73) and Verdi (52).¹⁵⁰

Despite his determination to control every other aspect of the music he performed, Costa did not exercise similar powers over the opera repertory. Busby's Dictionary reflected the tradition that the selection of the programme was the manager's task.¹⁵¹ It was the manager, operating without subsidy in an increasingly competitive environment, who carried most of the financial risk; and it was he who was blamed for the deficiencies of the prospectus. One of the themes of Lumley's *Reminiscences* is that, whereas Laporte was 'scarcely allowed a voice in the selection of operas or even in the choice of artists', Lumley ran his own ship.¹⁵² The same was true of Gye and Mapleson. But while the managers had the final say, Gye was disingenuous when he claimed to the Prince of Wales, after his break with Costa, that 'no opera, during the whole 20 years that I have had the theatre, was ever done at Costa's recommendation'.¹⁵³ Gye's repertoire was shaped to a considerable extent by the fact that Costa and his musicians could put on such polished performances of Mozart (including a much-praised revival of *Così fan tutte*) as well as the main bel canto operas and those of Meyerbeer and Verdi. There are few instances of Costa proposing an opera for performance (for

¹⁵⁰ Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts*, 298.

¹⁵¹ Busby, *Complete Dictionary* (1806), under 'Director'.

¹⁵² Lumley, *Reminiscences*, 9

¹⁵³ Gye, 22 June 1869.

example Donizetti's *Dom Sebastien*).¹⁵⁴ But he influenced the repertoire in several important respects. Gye consulted him before finalising his prospectus, especially in the early days. In 1850, Gye 'proposed' to offer 6 new operas in 1850, but Costa 'persuaded me against my wishes to announce 5 operas to be done instead of 6'.¹⁵⁵ In 1851, Gye wrote from Berlin with six 'ideas for next season' but Costa decreed that *La clemenza di Tito* and Rossini's *Otello* were not ready.¹⁵⁶ The following year, Gye wrote: 'I look forward to having a talk soon about plans for next season'.¹⁵⁷

Gye's *Diary* confirms that Costa also influenced the programme through his advice about the performability of specific works (Verdi's *Don Carlos* or Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette*), their suitability for the house's singers (a comic opera that would suit Ronconi) and especially their state of readiness for performance.¹⁵⁸ Costa's known antipathy to certain works also influenced the programme: Mapleson claimed that it was fear of offending Costa that prevented him from putting on Offenbach's operas in the 1870s.¹⁵⁹ But Costa's last season – which included *Mignon*, *Carmen*, *Lohengrin* and Balfe's late *Talismano* – did not suggest a dyed-in-the-wool reactionary. In practice, Costa's tastes appear to have been very similar to those of his managers (Chapter 9.4.). Significantly, there was little change of repertoire following his departure from Covent Garden in 1869.

¹⁵⁴ Gye 3 March 1862.

¹⁵⁵ Gye, 20 Feb. 1850.

¹⁵⁶ Gye, 21 Feb. and 25 March 1850. ROHC, Gye-Costa corr. (10 Feb. 1851).

¹⁵⁷ ROHC, Gye-Costa corr. (15 Oct. ?1852).

¹⁵⁸ ROHC, Gye-Costa corr. (15 June 1858 and 5 Dec. 1866).

¹⁵⁹ Mapleson, *Memoirs*, 306.

In the case of the opera concerts, it was Costa rather than the managers who fixed the programmes. Since these concerts were a crucial source of income for the company, they aimed for the same broad appeal as the benefit concerts. The *Times* complained in 1850 that the programme of ‘a couple of hackneyed overtures and the accompaniments of a string of Italian cavatinas and duets...differs in nothing from the fashionable monster concerts’.¹⁶⁰ Costa and Jullien managed to add more serious content, though the latter’s efforts were met with ‘loud (and sometimes riotous) disapproval’.¹⁶¹ The emphasis in Costa’s operas concerts was heavily on familiar arias and overtures. A good performance of Beethoven’s Symphony no. 7 in 1878 led the *Times* to regret that he had ‘wasted his splendid orchestra’s resources on the performance of hackneyed overtures’.¹⁶²

9.3.2 Symphonic

There was a widespread view that Costa enjoyed the same power over the Philharmonic as at the opera and the SHS. Elkin’s history of 1946 perpetuated the impression that he exercised ‘a dictatorship’.¹⁶³ Michael Musgrave claims that he was ‘potentially most free’ at the Philharmonic.¹⁶⁴ But it is clear from the critics that there was no change to the Philharmonic tradition under which each concert was programmed by one of the Directors. Davison stated explicitly that Costa ‘had no authority to make the programmes or engage the band’. The *Examiner* confirmed that Costa was responsible only for the execution; the selection of the programme and soloists rested with the

¹⁶⁰ *Times* (25 May 1850).

¹⁶¹ *ILN* (21 Nov 1861), 530.

¹⁶² *Times* (28 Aug. 1878 and 3 June 1879).

¹⁶³ Elkin, *Annals*, 43.

¹⁶⁴ Musgrave, *An audience for classical music*, 174.

Directors, who were blamed for the Philharmonic's cautious fare.¹⁶⁵ Costa was invited to attend programming meetings but, with his heavy duties at the opera and the SHS, he seems to have attended infrequently. A formal request for him to attend in order to help them to make out the programmes suggests that he ceased to attend programming meetings after Sterndale Bennett's re-election in 1853.¹⁶⁶

There are numerous cases of the Directors asking Costa to source scores and parts of works that they had selected: for example Schubert's symphonies, Schumann's overtures and works by Mehul and Cherubini.¹⁶⁷ But Costa's role was basically to conduct what the Directors chose. The few Philharmonic premieres during Costa's 9 years – Schumann's, *Introduction, Scherzo and Finale* (in 1853) and Symphony no. 1 (1854), Mendelssohn's 'Come Ye Sons of Art' (1848), Spohr's Symphony no. 8 (1848) and Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* (1846) – throw no light on Costa's preferences.¹⁶⁸ Some of these may indeed have been included at the initiative of Albert, who had a major say in about 11 command performances between 1843-60.¹⁶⁹

Costa no doubt exercised some indirect influence. He alone could say what pieces the orchestra would be able to prepare in the limited rehearsal time and which singers would be available. The Directors, aware that he would preside only over 'worthy' music, presumably knew what he would be willing to conduct. In 1853, anxious to retain him, they assured him that 'nothing shall be inserted in their programmes that

¹⁶⁵ *MW* (20 March 1852), 177. *Examiner* (15 March 1851). Also *Athenaeum* (12 July 1845), 697 and (2 Aug. 1845), 772.

¹⁶⁶ Hogarth-Costa (9 Jan. 1854), BL RPS MSS 330 fol. 77.

¹⁶⁷ Hogarth to Costa, 13 Feb. 1853. BL MSS 330, fol. 60v.

¹⁶⁸ Nettel, *The Orchestra in England*, 172.

¹⁶⁹ Foster, *History of the Philharmonic Society*, 176-263.

shall in any way be disagreeable or objectionable to you'.¹⁷⁰ Aware of his prejudice, they prevented Arabella Goddard from performing Sterndale Bennett's Piano Concerto in C Minor. This led Davison (Goddard's husband and Bennett's close friend) to open a fresh campaign against Costa ('Director of the Directors', 'Napoleon III' and 'conductor in perpetuo'), which probably reinforced his intention to resign.¹⁷¹ But this episode was exceptional: Costa does not seem to have refused to take on any works except those by Sterndale Bennett.¹⁷²

The make-up of Philharmonic programmes suggests that Costa's tenure there marked virtually no change of repertoire (Appendix E). 'Canonic' composers accounted for 67% of the Philharmonic's repertoire in 1853/4, compared with 56-68% in the previous three decades. Those thought to be their successors – Cherubini, Hummel, Spohr, Dussek, etc – made up a further 15%, compared to 13-19% in earlier decades. There was surprisingly a slight reduction in the number of operatic items, which some had feared Costa would increase. Similarly, there was little change in the excessive length of Philharmonic programmes, beyond a tendency to end the second half with a major work.¹⁷³ Overall the programming remained cautious and backward-looking. The Directors clearly believed, in the words of their secretary Hogarth, that 'there was no longer a Haydn, a Mozart, a Beethoven, a Weber, a Spohr or a Mendelssohn...the line of these illustrious men had not been continued by successors of kindred genius...'¹⁷⁴ The (reasonable) assumption that Costa shared this conservatism contributed to the later

¹⁷⁰ Letter from Hogarth to Costa, 17 Nov. 1853. BL RPS MSS 330.

¹⁷¹ *MW* (16-30 April 1853), 237 and 255; and (29 July 1854), 504.

¹⁷² Hogarth, *Philharmonic Society*, 193.

¹⁷³ *Morning Chronicle* (16 March 1847).

¹⁷⁴ Hogarth, *Philharmonic Society*, 87-8.

verdict that he was less ‘progressive’ than conductors of the next generation, such as Manns and Halle.

9.3.3 Choral

The domain where Costa had the widest scope to decide which works to perform was the SHS. Here he was constrained only by the limited number of oratorios then available in performing editions and the conservative tastes of the audience. Of the 538 performances in the first 50 years of the SHS, 46% were by Handel, 25% Mendelssohn and 14% Haydn, 4% Mozart and 3% Costa.¹⁷⁵ As in his other contracts, he stipulated that ‘in case the programme includes new work composed expressly for the Festival, or any piece of music to which I might object, they must be conducted by the composers themselves or anybody else the committee may choose to appoint’. But in practice Costa was comparatively adventurous. His 31-year tenure at the SHS was marked by four new features.

First he broadened the range of Handel oratorios offered by the Society, using versions edited from the originals, mainly in the Royal Library. Costa added eight Handel oratorios to the ten that were already in the SHS repertoire when he took over in 1849.¹⁷⁶ Second, he embedded the practice of performing whole oratorios (albeit in abbreviated form), instead of excerpts interspersed with instrumental pieces and duets.¹⁷⁷ On the Society’s 50th anniversary, the *Musical Times* singled this out as its

¹⁷⁵ Bowley, *Sacred Harmonic Society*.

¹⁷⁶ The SHS repertoire included *Messiah*, *Judas Maccabeus*, *Samson*, *Solomon*, *Joshua*, *Saul*, *Jephtha*, *Deborah*, *Athalia*, and *Belshazzar’s Feast*. Costa added *Alexander*, *the Dettingen Te Deum*, *Esther*, *Israel in Egypt*, *Joseph and his Brethren*, *Susannah*, *Theodora* and *Zadok the Priest*. Scores at the Foundling Museum in London. Costa also orchestrated parts of *Semele*, *Ezio* and *L’Allegro, Il Penseroso ed il Moderato*.

¹⁷⁷ Bowley, *Sacred Harmonic Society*, 7.

main achievement.¹⁷⁸ Third, he introduced works new to the SHS: the first complete public performance of Mozart's *Requiem* ('virtually...a novelty'¹⁷⁹), Cherubini's *Requiem*, Haydn masses, Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* and *Mount of Olives*, Mendelssohn's *Athalia*, *Lauda son* and *Christus*, Spohr's *Calvary* and Rossini's *Stabat Mater*. Finally he put on several early performances, including Griesbach's *Daniel* (1854), Saint-Saëns' *La lyre et la harpe* (1876), Benedict's *St Cecilia* (1867), Crotch's neglected *Palestine* (1874), Macfarren's *St John the Baptist* (1874), Sullivan's *Martyr of Antioch* (1881) and Gounod's *Redemption* (1882).¹⁸⁰ The Birmingham Festival was singled out for its policy of introducing newly commissioned works.¹⁸¹

Costa had little freedom of choice at the big state concerts but he shared some responsibility for their tedium and narrow programming. The re-opening of the Crystal Palace in 1854, for example, consisted of the National Anthem, Psalm 100 and the 'Hallelujah' Chorus. The programme for the Alexander Palace concert in June 1875 was described as 'most uninteresting, save to those who delight in a concert made up of operatic shreds and patches, and believe in Sir Michael Costa as much as (by the fact of his name appearing three times in the programme) he appears to believe in himself'.¹⁸²

In conclusion, it is not possible to ascribe a repertoire to Costa, given his limited direct influence on programming in the opera house and concert hall. It is therefore more pertinent to speak not of his repertoire but of his personal tastes and relationships.

¹⁷⁸ *Musical Times*, vol. 22, No. 465 (1 Nov.1881), 564-565. This policy had been trailed by George Smart at Liverpool. *Morning Chronicle* (11 Aug. 1836).

¹⁷⁹ *Morning Chronicle* (10 Feb. 1853).

¹⁸⁰ SHS programmes can be consulted at the RCM.

¹⁸¹ *Musical Times*, cited in *Mirror of Music*, 158.

¹⁸² *Musical Times* vol. 17, No. 388 (1 June 1875), 110.

9.4 Costa's Tastes and Relations with Contemporaries

Costa was, as the *Athenaeum* tactfully put it, 'a man somewhat narrow in his sympathies'.¹⁸³ Joseph Bennett observed that, in the rare instances where Costa could be charged with carelessness, it was connected with works that he cordially disliked'.¹⁸⁴ As a man with trenchant attitudes, Costa clearly had trenchant likes and dislikes.

His taste was formed in a musically sophisticated city (Naples) but by conservative teachers - his grandfather Giacomo Tritto and tutor Zingarelli. His early success in London was mainly in the bel canto school and all writers assume that this was his core taste. The *ILN* believed that his favourite opera was Donizetti's *La Favorita*. But Shaw was probably correct in his comment that 'The master who receives the fullest justice from Sir Michael is Rossini, to whose music he is wedded by taste and nationality'.¹⁸⁵ The *Musical Times* agreed: 'He was never so happy as when conducting *Il Barbiere* or *Semiramide*'.¹⁸⁶ Rossini was the source of the famous joke at the expense of Costa's compositions: 'Good old Costa has just sent me one of his oratorio scores and a Stilton cheese. The Stilton was very good...'¹⁸⁷ But paradoxically there are over 40 letters testifying to Rossini's unusually affectionate relationship with Costa, who became his surrogate son - 'Amatissimo figlio' (Appendix B).

The *Musical World* obituary claimed that Costa's favourite contemporary composer was Meyerbeer, whose works accounted for nearly a third of Covent Garden's performances

¹⁸³ *Athenaeum* (3 May 1884), 576.

¹⁸⁴ Bennett, *Life of Bennett*, 52.

¹⁸⁵ *Shaw's Music*, vol. 1, 170.

¹⁸⁶ *Musical Times* (1 June 1884), 321.

¹⁸⁷ Sims Reeves, *My Jubilee* (London: London Musical Publishing Company, 1889), 165.

between 1848 and 1855.¹⁸⁸ Meyerbeer's huge orchestral and choral effects played to Costa's strengths and for several years he was the only composer whose new works Costa was committed by contract to conduct. Notoriously choosy about who should perform his works, Meyerbeer visited Covent Garden incognito and attended a chorus rehearsal before agreeing that they should have *L'Africaine*.¹⁸⁹ He entrusted his works to Costa because he appreciated 'the high intelligence with which Mr Costa conducted all the works in question; and because I could not entrust the directing of my music to hands more skilful and conscientious'.¹⁹⁰ They appear to have got on well, socialising at Ella's parties and collaborating closely over the radical adaptations needed to make Meyerbeer's operas performable in London.¹⁹¹

The other contemporary composer whom Costa was assumed to admire was Mendelssohn.¹⁹² There is no evidence that they were personally close, since Costa concentrated almost entirely on opera until 1846 and Mendelssohn was friendlier with the Davison-Sterndale Bennett set. But they shared the rostrum at Mendelssohn's last Philharmonic concert in April 1847, when he performed Beethoven's Piano Concerto no. 4 under Costa's 'respectful baton'. Mendelssohn's music featured prominently during Costa's years at the Philharmonic and SHS. By 1855, the *Musical World* claimed that Mendelssohn was, with Handel, 'now his chief delight'.¹⁹³ Costa presided at the concert to unveil an eight-foot statue to him at the Crystal Palace.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁸ *RMU* (1880), 28. 228 performances out of 897.

¹⁸⁹ Gye, 19 and 29 June 1855.

¹⁹⁰ Cox, *Musical Recollections*, vol. 2, 288. Gye, 19 and 29 June 1855.

¹⁹¹ *RMU* (1880), 28. 228 performances out of 897.

¹⁹² *MW* (27 Jan. 1855), 56..

¹⁹³ *MW* (27 Jan. 1855), 56.

¹⁹⁴ *Musical Times* (April 1871), quoted in Scholes, *Mirror of Music*, 420.

The 109 Beethoven performances during his years at the Philharmonic enabled Costa to refute the previous assumption that he was incapable of doing justice to Beethoven. The *Graphic* asserted that he was ‘never happier than when conducting *Fidelio*’ and Berlioz judged his performance favourably.¹⁹⁵ But Shaw considered that he played the German repertoire conscientiously rather than with keen relish. As aesthetic fashion changed, it was said that his handling of Beethoven ‘sometimes bordered on caricature’.¹⁹⁶ The *Musical World* obituary commented that Beethoven was ‘not to be found in Costa’s “heart of hearts”’. He respected the great master but could never understand him sufficiently to be able to get on terms of confidence.’

The *Musical Times* believed that J.S. Bach’s musical language was another ‘unknown tongue’ to Costa.¹⁹⁷ This is supported by a letter from the organiser of the Leeds Festival to Sullivan, recalling their difficulty in persuading Costa to perform Bach. Joseph Bennett left an amusing account of Costa’s only recorded performance of the *St Matthew Passion*:

They want Bach, do they? They shall have him...all of him. Not a note of the music would Costa leave out...I...knew not whether to laugh or weep as it went on. There was comedy in the scene; Costa calm, relentless, no doubt suffering, but absolutely unaffected; the great chorus, anxious, wondering what would be the end; and the huge audience melting away at increasing speed. Even the devotion of the Clapham non-conformists could not endure the complete Bach...When I left, Costa, calm as ever, was still waving his baton and the chorus, weary and worn, were singing with less than half a heart...¹⁹⁸

A distaste for Wagner became part of the Costa caricature. Stanford claimed that ‘he cordially disliked Wagner and all his work’ and recalled seeing Costa ‘who had come

¹⁹⁵ *Graphic* (6 July 1877). Berlioz, *Feuilleton du Journal des Débats* (1 July 1851).

¹⁹⁶ *Athenaeum* obituary (3 May 1884), 576/7.

¹⁹⁷ *Musical Times* (1 June 1884), 321.

¹⁹⁸ Bennett, *Forty Years*, 332/3.

[to Berlin] incognito to swallow Tristan and Isolde and looked as if the meal had disagreed with him'.¹⁹⁹ Stanford also recycled Richter's claim to have found 430 errors in the score used by Costa for *Lohengrin* in 1875 (which had, of course, been radically adapted for the Italian Opera).²⁰⁰ The image of Costa as anti-Wagnerian probably owes much to the damning comparisons of their record with the Philharmonic and to inferences drawn from his association with Mendelssohn and especially Meyerbeer. Hueffer wrote that there might be some truth in Wagner's suspicion that Costa was behind the hostility he encountered at the Philharmonic: 'the Italian faction, *with Costa at their head*, naturally hated him.'²⁰¹ It certainly made for amusing copy, as in Klein's story of Costa referring to the swan in *Lohengrin* as 'Dat Goose'²⁰²

Against this, there is Princess Victoria's report from Berlin to Queen Victoria that she had arranged a special performance of *Lohengrin* in 1867 for Costa, who 'had never heard an opera of Wagner's and I think he was much struck by it'.²⁰³ This probably overstates Costa's enthusiasm for the opera, though critics thought Costa's ten performances at Her Majesty's were superior to Covent Garden's.²⁰⁴ He also conducted Wagner's early *Das Liebesmalh der Apostel* at the 1876 Birmingham Festival, where he could have refused if he had wished. On Wagner, as on most musical issues, he seems to have shared the attitude of most of his contemporaries.

One other unsympathetic relationship was with Gounod. According to Stanford, he 'disliked the Frenchman's pose'. At the last rehearsal of *The Redemption* at

¹⁹⁹ *Pages from an Unwritten Diary*, 173, 206 and 142.

²⁰⁰ Mapleson *Memoirs*, 137.

²⁰¹ Hueffer, *Half a century of Music*, 50-51.

²⁰² Klein, *Thirty Years*, 47. Stanford, *Pages*, 173.

²⁰³ Princess Royal-Queen Victoria (2 Oct.1867), RA VIC/Z 20/47.

²⁰⁴ *Graphic* (24 June 1876), *Examiner* (19 June 1875), Klein, *Thirty Years*, 47.

Birmingham, ‘Costa chose a silent moment to score off him by suddenly turning in his seat and calling out “Where that fool...?”’²⁰⁵ Dislike did not prevent Costa from giving performances of Gounod that were well-received. But there is a revealing caricature of the two of them conducting *The Redemption*, with Gounod urging the orchestra to greater effort and Costa signalling to them to play quietly (Fig. 9.6).

The two most difficult relationships to read were with Berlioz and Verdi. Berlioz gave a characteristically conspiratorial account of his dealings in the context of Covent Garden’s production of *Benvenuto Cellini* in 1853. Costa was cooperative and ready (no doubt with some relief) to hand over the baton for the performance. Berlioz predicted that it would be much better than the *Malvenuto* of Paris, since the orchestra was well prepared and everyone was on his side – something that could not have happened without



Fig. 9.6 Caricature of Costa and Gounod. (Bennett, *Forty Years of Music*, 291).

Costa’s goodwill.²⁰⁶ After the disastrous first night, he wrote to thank Costa and the orchestra for their generous offer to put on a concert for him.²⁰⁷ In his *Memoirs*,

²⁰⁵ Stanford, *Pages from an Unwritten Diary*, 202-3.

²⁰⁶ Berlioz-Barbier, *Correspondence Générale de Hector Berlioz*, ed. Pierre Citron, vol. 4, 326 and 5, 197.

²⁰⁷ Berlioz-Sainton (8 July 1853), Bennett, *Forty Years*, 156.

however, he later wrote that ‘Costa secretly opposes me wherever he can’.²⁰⁸ He only half-contradicted a rumour that Costa’s influence was behind the hostile reaction to *Benvenuto Cellini*: ‘If it was, as is quite possible, then he is a master of dissembling; his eagerness to be of use to me and to help me during rehearsals allayed any suspicions I may have had.’²⁰⁹

There was inevitably some suspicion and rivalry between them, given that Berlioz briefly conducted the rival New Philharmonic orchestras. Berlioz informed Liszt that his appointment had stirred up the London establishment, especially Costa. He wrote gloatingly to his sister Adele that Costa was jealous of his growing reputation as a conductor, adding later: ‘I am also a dreadful nuisance to *some other positions*, especially Italian ones.’²¹⁰ In criticising London orchestral practice, it suited Berlioz to focus his attack on Costa as his only serious rival in London (Chapter 9.2.4).

Berlioz does not seem to have felt towards Costa the hostility he showed to Habeneck or most of the other Parisian conductors. He reviewed Costa’s conducting favourably in 1848 and 1851, commenting in a private letter that the Philharmonic was ‘beyond reproach, and Costa conducts it superbly’ (though he told another correspondent that he had pulled his punches in commenting on London performances).²¹¹ Costa unusually agreed to share the podium for a concert of Berlioz’s works at the ‘Old’ Philharmonic in 1853. They had several mutual friends – such as Gruneisen, Sainton, Ella and Chorley. They were simply very different personalities who represented different schools. It is hard to imagine Berlioz going off on a spontaneous binge with Costa as he did with

208 Berlioz, *Memoirs*, 476.

209 Berlioz, *Memoirs*, 466-7.

210 Berlioz-Liszt (12 June 1852). Berlioz-Adèle (16 July 1853), *Correspondence Générale*.

211 Berlioz-Joseph d’Ortigue (15 March 1848). Berlioz-Bertin, cited in Cairns, *Berlioz*, vol. 2, 399.

Balfe when they met by chance in Paris. But equally, Berlioz was never likely to tease Costa with a nickname, as he did Balfe: ‘my Old Armchair’.²¹²

Towards Verdi Costa appears to have shared the initial London prejudice. In 1847, Verdi’s secretary wrote back from London that the leading musicians at Covent Garden were hostile: Grisi and Mario were jealous and Costa was, after all, a Neapolitan...²¹³ In 1848, Costa returned from a visit to Italy reporting that opera singers were stipulating in their contracts that they should not be made to sing Verdi.²¹⁴ In 1862, there was public friction when Costa was one of the Commissioners who rejected a *Hymn of the Nations* for baritone and chorus that Verdi had submitted for the Great Exhibition. Verdi reported that the incident ‘has brought me a deluge of letters, raining the wrath of God on the Commissioners and Costa’.²¹⁵ The rejection was blamed variously on the late arrival of Verdi’s score, its republican tone and Costa’s annoyance at not being asked to represent Italy. But Costa is unlikely to have been the moving figure on a committee that had also invited Sterndale Bennett to compose a piece to represent England.

Their relationship changed as Costa became the most successful conductor of Verdi’s operas in England.²¹⁶ The *ILN* quoted Verdi as one of several composers who had pronounced Costa’s orchestra ‘the finest ever collected within the walls of a lyric theatre’.²¹⁷ After seeing Costa conduct *Rigoletto* in 1856, Arditi recalled that ‘for all-

²¹² Cairns, *Berlioz* vol. 2, 399. A reference to a popular song from *The Maid of Honour*, ‘This old chair’.

²¹³ Muzio-Barezzi (29 June 1847).

²¹⁴ Davison-Ryan. *MW* (6 Nov. 1848), 701.

²¹⁵ Verdi-Arrivabene (2 May 1862), *Bolletini no. 5 dell’ Istituto di Studi Verdiani*, 724.

²¹⁶ *Ernani* (1845), *Il due Foscari* (1847), *Nabucco* (1850), *Rigoletto* (1853), *Il trovatore* (1855), *La traviata* (1857), *Ballo in Maschera* (1861), *Don Carlos* (1867) and *Aida* (1879).

²¹⁷ *ILN* (28 Aug. 1847), 139.

round excellence it would be hard to surpass even now'.²¹⁸ In 1867, his performance of *Don Carlos* was described by Verdi as much better than the Paris premiere, adding that 'you are not telling me anything new when you say that Costa is a great conductor'.²¹⁹ Verdi followed this production with a remarkable letter to Costa in which he explained that he had not written to thank him for his earlier productions because he feared it would be taken as flattery. But:

Now that my career is over, or nearly so, such a doubt vanishes and this perhaps false pride falls to the ground. Knowing myself a great artist and a man of character, I hope that you will understand my pride (*fierezza*) and not be unduly offended by it. Therefore accept with good will my sincere thanks for *Don Carlos*, the expression of my highest esteem for your very great genius; and, if unfortunate circumstances or misunderstandings have kept us apart up to now, I hope soon to be able to shake your hand and to see you hasten to accept the greeting from a man who has always had the highest regard for your talent and character. Your devoted G Verdi.²²⁰

9.5 Overview

As a composer, he evolved from a competent exposition of bel canto style to a passable imitation of the Mendelssohnian oratorio. But he lacked the melodic creativity which both genres demanded and, by the 1870s, he was stranded in outdated styles. As an arranger of other composers' works, he shared the contemporary view that it was necessary to adapt older scores to the full potential of the new orchestra and to cut new ones to the length tolerated in London. But he adjusted to at least some aspects of the new aesthetic: the rejection of pastiche and substitution; the sense that operas and oratorios should be presented whole rather than through excerpts; and the notion that, except for Handel's oratorios, modern scores should not be unduly re-orchestrated.

²¹⁸ Arditi, *Reminiscences*, 37.

²¹⁹ Verdi-Escudier (11 June 1867), RMI (1928), 525.

²²⁰ Verdi-Costa (6 July 1867), *Autograph Letters of Musicians at Harvard*, 483 and 480-1.

As a conductor, he was indifferent to the emerging idea that it was his duty to provide personal ‘readings’. His primary concern was to provide good straightforward accounts of whatever he was asked to perform. By insisting on having enough advance notice – and on adequate rehearsal time – he was thus better able than Balfe, Arditi and others to oppose managerial whims and to deliver polished performances to tight deadlines.

In relation to the repertoire, his situation was very different from that of Jullien – and later Manns and especially Halle – who were comparatively free to select their own programmes.²²¹ But, despite his notorious refusal to commit himself to take on new works, his long career led him in practice through a radical change of repertory – from Rossini and Mercadante to reasonably successful performances of Wagner (*Lohengrin*) Verdi (*Don Carlos* and *Aida*) and Bizet (*Carmen*).

There is a sense that, having struggled to establish his reforms, to whip defective orchestras and choirs into shape, to win the battle of the opera houses and to be accepted as ‘English’, he settled comfortably into the mainstream tastes of mid-Victorian Britain. By the end of his career – longer than that of any other practising musician – he was largely isolated from contemporary trends in European music. He was inevitably seen as the surviving symbol of early Victorian music-making and therefore as a potent obstacle to new musical trends. This image, correct but exaggerated, was reflected in the rapid eclipse of his reputation, which is considered in the final chapter.

221 On Manns, see Musgrave, *An audience for classical music*.

Chapter 10: Costa's Significance in English Music

10.1 The Last years



Fig. 10.1 Costa in 1882.

By 1880, Costa was 70 years old, at a time when life expectancy for those who reached the age of 15 was still only 60. His letters frequently complain of fatigue and stomach troubles. His last portrait photographs show a man wearied by 50 years of effort (Fig. 10.1). By 1879, he was conducting only four operas a week, leaving the other two to his first violin, Prosper Sainton.¹ He conducted his last Handel Festival in 1880 and his last Birmingham Festival in 1882. Early that

year, Victoria recorded in her diary 'Poor Sir Michael Costa is very ill, having had a stroke. He was paralysed and could neither speak or use his left arm, but has partially recovered the use of both.'² One critic noticed the detrimental effect that his illness had on his conducting.³ Halle commented that 'Poor Costa looks awful, but gets through his work in spite of his illness. There is indomitable pluck in the old fellow.'⁴ He relinquished his masonic posts and went to convalesce in Hove where he suffered an apoplectic seizure on 27 April 1884 and died three days later.

1 *Athenaeum* (19 July 1879), 90.

2 RA QVJ 2 Feb. 1882.

3 *Pall Mall Gazette* (5 Sept. 1882).

4 Halle-Marie (28 Aug. 1882), Michael Kennedy, *The Halle Tradition: a century of music* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960), 84.

His last illness was the subject of daily bulletins in the *Times*, which was ready with an obituary the following morning. After a Church of England funeral service, he was buried next to his father at Kensal Green Cemetery. The cortege included the Duke of Wellington, Halle, Sullivan, Benedict, Carl Rosa, Santley, Bevignani and the younger Gye brothers, as well as representatives of the musical institutions and the Italian community. He left his estate to his brother Raphael, with provision for it to be used on the latter's death to fund scholarships for British composers to study in Germany. It totalled £6,789, which the *Musical Times* described as the biggest musical bequest since Handel and a fitting sign of his gratitude to his adopted country.⁵

In his last years, he was a relic from a different age. Most of his contemporaries had faded away. A new generation of musicians was in the ascendant: composers like Bizet, Dvořák and Brahms, singers such as de Reszke, Maurel and Lehmann and conductors like Richter and von Bülow. The small classical band of his youth, under its string leader, had been replaced by the large modern orchestra under its professional conductor. The candle-light of the King's Theatre in the 1830s had progressively given way to gas and later electric lighting. But these shifts of context and mood do not entirely explain the rapidity with which his awesome reputation gave way to disparagement and oblivion.

10.2 Reputation

Costa's musical achievement probably peaked in the 1850s when, having reformed the orchestra and chorus at the opera, he did the same at the Philharmonic (1846), Covent Garden (1847), the SHS (1848), the Birmingham Festival (1849) and the Handel Festival (1857). Thereafter, his ubiquity, energy and longevity ensured that he remained

⁵ *Daily Telegraph*, reprinted in *New York Times* (18 July 1884).

a dominant figure on the Victorian scene. Klein described him as ‘the once all-powerful Sir Michael Costa’.⁶ Joseph Bennett commented that he was:

at the top of the profession, organising, marshalling and directing the operating of the principal musical forces of England, conducting Meyerbeer’s operas, Handel’s oratorios and Beethoven’s symphonies without a rival...he could hardly have risen higher.⁷

In a world where conductors were hired and fired at short notice, Costa appeared to be indispensable. This was demonstrated when Lumley tried to entice him back in 1856, despite their past discord, and when Mapleson engaged him as soon as he broke up with Gye in 1871.⁸ He rehearsed and conducted virtually every performance during his 26 years at the Italian Opera and 21 years at Covent Garden.⁹ None of his contemporaries or successors carried a comparable workload.

His reputation benefited from the positive image of the institutions that he had rescued. The opera house in particular changed from ‘what John Bull would stigmatise with a sneer as a *foreignneering* concern’ – associated with xenophiliac customers and effete Italian and French and musicians – to that of a successful English institution, patronised by a reformed monarchy and a respectable, serious clientele.¹⁰ The *Times* commented in 1844 that English audiences now had ‘the remarkable satisfaction of saying, “It is we that have made it.” This ever renders the opera an object of national satisfaction.’¹¹ In addition, Costa’s position at the SHS identified him with the explosion of musical activity in middle England and brought him the kudos of directing ‘the leading musical

⁶ Klein, *The Golden Age of Opera*, 118.

⁷ Bennett, *Forty Years*, 50.

⁸ Lumley, *Reminiscences*, 366. Confirmed by Gye, 21 May 1856.

⁹ The only exceptions were brief appearances by Vaccai, Berlioz and Spohr, and rare stand-in duties by Sainton and Alfred Mellon.

¹⁰ John Murray, *The World of London* (London: Murray, 1851), 155.

¹¹ *Times* (19 Aug. 1844).

institution of its class in the world'.¹² If the English had not recently produced a major composer, they could at least thank Costa for showing that they were among the leading practitioners and consumers of music.

His knighthood in 1869 (the first for conducting) gave him a unique status until the epidemic of musical knighthoods in the following decades. He remained in favour with the royal family, especially the Princess Royal (whom he had taught) and the Prince of Wales (the leading Mason). His position at the opera was also a source of social status.¹³ He was frequently mentioned in the press and media. As early as 1835, Costa figured in Thackeray's *Cox's Diary* as one of the musicians whom the *nouveaux riches* Coxes mispronounce – 'Mr Coster', along with 'Tomrubini' and 'Lablash'.¹⁴ Three months before his death, he appeared in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Princess Ida*, leading the serenading party to besiege the walls of the castle.

His image was boosted by the publication of lithographs, photographs and caricatures that went with the celebrity culture of mid-Victorian England. There are probably more portraits of Costa than of any London musician of the period, except for Lind, Grisi and Patti. His images often copy the aristocratic portraiture from which Victorian studies derived, attesting not only to his public position but also to the rising status of conductors (Chapter 2).¹⁵ His prominent role in the festivals and major state occasions further boosted his national profile. As the *Times* commented after the inauguration of the Albert Hall, he was 'the right man in the right place'.¹⁶

¹² Cox, *Musical Recollections*, vol. 2, 61.

¹³ Witt-Hall, *Fashionable Acts*, 349, note 202.

¹⁴ Thackeray, *Miscellaneous Prose and Verse* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1835), 482.

¹⁵ Mathieson, 'Embodying Music', 116-25.

¹⁶ *Times* (13 April 1871).

Costa attracted respectful obituaries, embellished with the fairy tale theme of the journey from his disastrous start in Birmingham to his successes in the opera house, concert hall and festivals. The *Athenaeum* stated that his ‘wholly exceptional position’ was due to the fact that he was not only a great conductor but also ‘the first great conductor who has permanently resided in this country’.¹⁷ The *Musical Times* wrote that he was ‘certain to reach posterity in his quality as a conductor’.¹⁸ The *Times* predicted confidently that he ‘will have a permanent place in the history of English music’.¹⁹

All the obituaries agreed that he was pre-eminent among his British contemporaries. The *Musical Times* obituary commented that he ‘towered above the petty folk who were his rivals’. The *Musical World* said that ‘Better composers have lived and still live, but as a *chef d’orchestre* he stood, like Saul the son of Kish, head and shoulders above his fellows.’²⁰ As late as 1891, Shaw held up Costa in order to berate conductors like Arditi, Bevnigani, Vianesi, Logheder and Mancinelli, who made him think back ‘almost regretfully to the pointed steady unwavering beat of Costa’.²¹

10.3 Decline of Reputation

After his death, Costa’s reputation sank with remarkable rapidity. Joseph Bennett commented in 1897 that ‘The present generation knows little of Michael Costa’ and that his was a case of ‘the good is oft interred in their bones’.²² Shaw wrote of ‘the once

¹⁷ *Athenaeum* (3 May 1884), 576.

¹⁸ *Musical Times* (1 June 1884), 321-3.

¹⁹ *Times* (30 April 1884).

²⁰ *MW* (3 May 1884, 274-5.

²¹ *Shaw’s Music*, vol. 2, 322 and 1, 490.

²² Bennett, *Forty Years*, 50. *Musical Times* (1 Oct. 1897), 653.

famous and now forgotten conductor'.²³ The third edition of Grove's *Dictionary* (1927) wisely removed the judgement in its earlier editions that 'his services...will not soon be forgotten'. By the fifth edition (1954), the entry had been much abbreviated. There are many explanations for this speedy eclipse. They reveal much about Costa's limitations but also about the profound changes that affected English music in the later nineteenth-century.

One obvious reason lies in the nature of conducting. Costa lived in a period when the profession was still trying to establish itself. Apart from Costa (and perhaps Manns, who however conducted in suburban Sydenham), no other London-based conductor enjoyed a high metropolitan reputation until the reign of Henry Wood from the 1890s. In the era before the virtuosi like Richter and von Bülow, conductors did not attract attention and often did not even appear on the playbill. This was especially true of opera conductors, who lacked the aesthetic prestige of symphonic conductors – despite Berlioz' claim that opera presented the sterner challenge.²⁴ Costa died four years before Edison's pioneering recording – which was, ironically, of his own Handel Festival chorus and orchestra.

The removal of Costa's domineering personality dissipated the aura of fear and deference that had bolstered his stature during his later years. The *Athenaeum* commented that 'Of late years there may have been too much of blind hero-worship'. Vaughan Williams echoed this: 'Perhaps the exaggerated respect paid to Costa during his lifetime has caused too violent a reaction since his death.'²⁵ Even before his death, his irascible and unbending nature had led managers and festival committees to prefer

²³ Shaw-*Times* (14 Oct. 1941). Also *Shaw's Music*, vol. 3, 757.

²⁴ Berlioz, Supplement to *Traité*, 245.

²⁵ *Athenaeum* (3 May 1884), 576. Vaughan Williams in Grove 2, 587.

less inflexible men, such as Sullivan (Leeds), Richter (Birmingham) and Arditi (Her Majesty's). By the 1870s, he was a hang-over from a phase of orchestral evolution from which English music was ready to move on. He was associated with musical genres – Italian opera, oratorios, mammoth festivals – which, although still popular, were losing artistic prestige. As Nettel observed adding that 'every lover of the orchestra knows how superior in taste is symphonic music to choral music...' ²⁶ Despite all his efforts to anglicise himself, Costa remained associated with 'abroad', the opera house and London – all phenomena that were repugnant to influential writers such as William Morris, John Ruskin and Henry Davey. ²⁷

Another reason for Costa's rapid eclipse was that he was never fully integrated into the musical Establishment. He lived aloof from his fellow-musicians, especially the influential cliques around Macfarren-Davison-Sterndale Bennett and Grove-Manns. Having resigned from the Philharmonic, he was not included among eleven musicians who were made honorary members there in 1859. The editor of the third edition of Grove, Colles, in an unpublished history of the Philharmonic, blamed Costa for the Society's lassitude and later decline. ²⁸

Costa, like Mendelssohn, also fell foul of the two dominant ideologies of late-Victorian music. He was attacked by the Wagnerians, who correctly saw him as the heir to the bel canto tradition of Tritto, Zingarelli and Rossini and linked aesthetically (and perhaps racially) to Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer. He was also anathema to the supporters of the English Musical Renaissance, for whom he typified the foreign and xenophiliac ethos of

²⁶ Nettel, *The Orchestra in England*, 148.

²⁷ Bennett Zon, "'Loathsome London': Ruskin, Morris and Henry Davey's *History of English Music* (1895)", *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 37, 359-375.

²⁸ Colles, H.C., *The Royal Philharmonic* (1937), BL RPO MSS 416.

the early Victorian era.²⁹ Costa's creative period fell on the wrong side of the divide which Fuller-Maitland, a high priest of the 'Renaissance', fixed in England's musical history between 'Before the Renaissance (1801-1850)' and the era of 'The Renaissance (1851-1900)'. In this mind-set, Costa was bound to be less well viewed than Manns, who (in addition to his close relationship with Grove) represented 'the first streak of the dawn of the renaissance'.³⁰

Although he had a few loyal friends, he was essentially a loner. He did not create a 'school' or a durable institution (like Gye, Halle or Wood).³¹ The institutions that might have perpetuated his memory (Her Majesty's and the SHS) did not survive; and those that did survive (Covent Garden and the Philharmonic) did not cherish his memory. He wrote no Memoirs, attracted no biography and left nothing to sustain his reputation, apart from the Michael Costa Scholarship at the Royal Academy of Music. His compositions did not enjoy even the modest immortality of Henry Bishop's 'Home Sweet Home' and Arditi's 'Il Bacio'. Because he was not an innovative composer, he fell foul of the late nineteenth-century goal-obsessed narrative in which 'the concept of progress assumes exaggerated importance, many works are struck from the historical record on the grounds that they have nothing new to say'.³² As a result, he did not finish up on a plinth (like Gye and Augustus Harris) or secure the place in Westminster Abbey that was accorded to less significant figures such as Thomas Greatedorex, Samuel Arnold, Sterndale Bennett, Ebenezer Williams and Michael Balfe.

²⁹ Hughes and Stradling, *The English Musical Renaissance*, 4-42.

³⁰ Fuller-Maitland, *English Music in the XIXth Century* (London: Grant Richards, 1902).

³¹ Barnett, *Musical Reminiscences and Impressions*, 82.

³² Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise* (London: Harper, 2007), xvii.

The common tendency of musicians to disparage their immediate predecessors seems to have been especially marked in the self-consciously ‘modern’ mood of late nineteenth-century England. Costa and his contemporaries attracted the same almost parricidal hostility that Lytton Strachey later showed to his *Eminent Victorians*. Davey’s influential history described the mid-nineteenth-century as ‘the prosaic period, when England...sank so far from its old reputation as to acquire the name of an unmusical country’.³³ Conducting was viewed – wrongly – as part of the desert of musical mediocrity that preceded the ‘English Musical Renaissance’.³⁴ Indeed Black’s *Dictionary* perversely blamed England’s modest creativity on ‘the great poverty of orchestras’. In an envious profession, where ‘harmony is made up of many discords’, Costa attracted much resentment, especially after his knighthood.³⁵

As the pre-eminent London conductor of the mid-century, Costa came to be seen as the very symbol of early Victorian musical malpractices. Shaw identified ‘the Gye-Mapleson-Costa regime’ with those Victorian musical vices that he detested: metronomic discipline, the ‘trombonisation’ of the classics and the stagnant repertoire of ‘the Donizettian Dark Ages’.³⁶ Costa was blamed for using his dominance in unenlightened directions: as an adapter of canonical works, an unimaginative time-beater and the purveyor of a reactionary repertoire. He became the main scapegoat for his period’s cavalier attitudes toward scores; Joseph Bennett pointed out, although Costa was ‘perfectly open to the charge...he was only one of many who shared his tastes and

³³ Davey, *History*, 366-7.

³⁴ For a good analysis of how earlier nineteenth-century music, especially English, was neglected as ‘before the English Musical Renaissance’, see Simon McVeigh, ‘The Society of British Musicians 1834-65 and the Campaign for Native Talent’ in eds Bashford and Langley, *Essays in honour of Cyril Ehrlich*.

³⁵ *Daily News* (16 April 1869).

³⁶ *Shaw’s Music*, vol. 2, 72 and 218.

practised his methods'.³⁷ These criticisms played to powerful notions of 'progress' and 'modernity' in the late nineteenth-century and the associated tendency to disparage mid-Victorian philistinism. They aligned Costa with aesthetics and repertoires which were in retreat before the music of the future.

Those who shaped Costa's posthumous reputation associated him mainly with his last decade, when his sympathies and his milieu (opera and oratorio rather than symphonic) were highly conservative. Stanford, who observed that 'Costa's heart was never in real sympathy with symphonic work', was only two years old when Costa left the Philharmonic and largely ceased to conduct symphonic concerts.³⁸ Fuller-Maitland, who contrasted 'the old professionals, such as Costa (conducting 'like a general directing a military operation') with Brahms, Wagner and Richter (who had 'a more persuasive manner...an element of something like mesmerism') began his career only in the year of Costa's retirement.³⁹ As Reginald Nettel commented perceptively, 'the Costa of the Philharmonic Society is forgotten while the Costa of the festivals lives'.⁴⁰

Because Costa's main achievements were of a practical and organisational nature, they were taken for granted by later generations, who assumed that centralised conducting and disciplined performance were part of the inevitable progress that characterised their era. Critics wearied of praising Costa's productions; a typical review of 1877 simply commented: 'to say anything in praise would be to repeat an oft-told story'.⁴¹ A few

³⁷ *Musical Times* (1 Oct. 1897), 664-6.

³⁸ Stanford, *Interludes records and reflections*, 19.

³⁹ Fuller Maitland, *A Door-keeper of Music*, (London: John Murray, 1929), 87.

⁴⁰ Nettel, *The Orchestra in England*, 148.

⁴¹ *Graphic* (30 June 1877).

older writers reminded their readers of what he had done to create respectable orchestras out of ‘the coarsest materials’.⁴² The *Musical World* obituary stated that:

The musical public can have no idea of the state of things which prevailed under the weak management of Sir George Smart and his compeers. It was simple lawlessness, which ashamed and disgusted such men as Spohr, Mendelssohn and Berlioz.⁴³

Joseph Bennett drew an analogy between Costa’s reforms and those of Carnot, who laid the foundations for the French revolutionary armies but was forgotten in the excitement of the victories that Napoleon secured through them.⁴⁴ Nettel wrote that Halle and Manns ‘were obliged to build upon the foundations Costa had laid, and it is unfortunate that more emphasis has not been laid on Costa’s early work’.⁴⁵ Those who contrasted Costa with for example Richter were overlooking how far the former had created the orchestral base for the latter’s achievements in England.

Chapter 5 discussed how, in the Manichaeian classification between traditional and progressive conducting styles, Costa was inevitably linked to the ‘elegant school’ of Mendelssohn. The watershed came with Richter’s seminal Albert Hall concert series in 1877, after which Vaughan Williams pronounced the Mendelssohn tradition ‘dead’.⁴⁶ Even Reginald Nettel, a writer sympathetic to Costa, believed that ‘First class orchestral playing in England dates from 1877’.⁴⁷ The decline of Mendelssohn’s reputation was harmful to Costa, who was the leading survivor from that school and period. Shaw described ‘the Costa conception of orchestra conducting’ as the antithesis of ‘the

⁴² Chorley, *Musical Recollections*, 84.

⁴³ *MW* (3 May 1884), 274-5

⁴⁴ Bennett, *Forty Years*, 53.

⁴⁵ Nettel, *The Orchestra in England*, 143.

⁴⁶ Grove 5, vol. 2, 399.

⁴⁷ Nettle, *The Orchestra in England*, 185.

Richter conception'.⁴⁸ This change of attitude is clear in the contrast between the entry on 'Conducting' in the first two editions of Grove. The 1879/89 edition held out Mendelssohn and Costa as models, observing that the function of conducting was 'to a great extent a mechanical one' and that the prerequisites were a clear beat and effective communication.⁴⁹ The much longer entry in Grove 2 leans heavily on Wagner's *Über das Dirigieren*.

In this new ethos, which gained ground in England only from the late 1870s, Costa was associated with a school of conducting that had been eclipsed by the new German school. His achievements on the rostrum were in any case effaced when the next generation of virtuoso conductors demonstrated what could be done with the recently reformed orchestras and a more adventurous repertoire – with the benefit, from the 1890s, of recordings to preserve their achievements. Later dictionaries largely ignored him completely or treated him as a minor footnote, often providing little more than the damning Rossini joke.⁵⁰

10.4 A Reassessment of Costa's Significance in English Music

From the middle of the twentieth century, there was a move to re-assess Costa's achievement as one explanation for the striking advances in musical direction and orchestral quality between the first and second halves of the previous century. A plausible case was made for seeing Costa as the man who first 'brought unity of purpose into the orchestra' (Nettel), 'the greatest English conductor in the first half of the last century...the first real conductor permanently settled in this country' (Carse) and 'by far the most experienced and admired conductor resident in London' (Ehrlich). More

⁴⁸ Shaw's *Music*, vol. 1, 525 and 2, 72. See also Fuller Maitland, *A Door-keeper of Music*, 87.

⁴⁹ Grove 1, 390.

⁵⁰ *The New Oxford Companion to Music* (Oxford: 1983) and New Grove, 970.

recently, Michael Musgrave has written that ‘due respect has been unfairly denied to Costa by his successors through ignorance of these achievements and they need to be set in perspective’.⁵¹ The significance of his reforms was belatedly recognised by the unveiling in 2005, by Antonio Pappano, of a Blue Plaque on his former residence.

This revisionism followed the twentieth-century reaction, led by Weingartner and taken up by Toscanini, against the theories of conducting associated with German Romanticism and the excesses of ‘Lisztian licence’.⁵² One recent writer traces a line of continuity back from Toscanini (and his slogan ‘*come scritto*’) to Costa’s literal approach.⁵³ The war between the schools of conducting was coming to be seen as a false polarisation, which underestimated the flexibility in the tempi applied by Mozart and Mendelssohn and exaggerated the liberties advocated by Wagner (who had been careful to stress that tempo variations should be *unmerklich* – ‘imperceptible’). In this changing climate, it became possible to look again at conductors like Costa and Habeneck.

A new perspective starts by setting aside aesthetic criteria that were not part of Costa’s world and the anachronistic caricatures inherited from the late nineteenth-century – summed up in Percy Young’s charge that Costa was responsible at the Philharmonic for ‘the mutilation of the classics’.⁵⁴ A fair assessment of Costa’s contribution needs to take account of several important contextual shifts between the early and late Victorian periods.

⁵¹ Musgrave, ‘Changing Values’, 184.

⁵² Felix Weingartner, *On Conducting*, trans. E. Newman (London: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1906).

⁵³ Rose, ‘The Italian Tradition’, ed. Bowen, *The Cambridge Companion to Conducting*, 151.

⁵⁴ Percy Young, ‘Orchestral Music’, ed. Temperley, *The Romantic Age*, 369.

The first is that of the radical changes of musical practice that swept across Europe in the three decades after 1830. As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, Costa applied in England various strands of reform that were already being implemented by others on the Continent, notably Weber, Mendelssohn, Berlioz, Spontini and Chélaré. Significantly, many of these were, like Costa, also competent administrators, with their own systems of music management – what Berlioz termed ‘conductor-instructor-organiser’.⁵⁵ Costa’s achievement can be seen in part as bringing England belatedly into line with practices on the Continent.

Costa’s life should also be viewed as one facet of the professionalisation of what was, by the mid-nineteenth-century, becoming the music industry. He was only one of many who applied to the production of music the processes of specialisation that was being introduced across the economy. They include the efforts of the much-ridiculed Jullien as well as Halle and Manns to widen the audience for classical music; John Ella’s promotion of chamber music; the work of educators such as Hullah and Curwen; stage managers like Augustus Harris; administrators and organisers like Grove, Cole and Bowley; publishers, notably Cramer and Novello; critics and musicologists; and impresarios (especially Lumley, Gye and Mapleson). In a period that failed to produce the English musical Messiah, they nevertheless created the infrastructure for the flourishing musical culture of the turn of the century.

The other essential context in which Costa needs to be placed is that of the rapidly shifting musical ethos of the period. Later writers like Shaw contrasted the world of the 1830s – caricatured as dominated by bel canto opera and the imitators of the Viennese classicists – with that of Wagner, Richard Strauss and the virtuoso conductors. But during the decades of Costa’s dominance, the dominant new ethos was not that of the

⁵⁵ Berlioz, *Memoirs*, cited by Southon, ‘L’émergence de la figure du chef d’orchestre’, 75.

late Romantics but that of the grand operas of Auber, Halevy, Meyerbeer and Verdi.

Indeed it is easy to underestimate the scale of the transition which practising musicians had to make between bel canto and grand opera. Grisi for example had to make a radical move from roles like Norma, Anna Bolena and Semiramide to those of Fides (*Les Huguenots*) and Alice (*Robert le diable*). Mario made the same leap with parts like Raoul (*Les Huguenots*) and John of Leyden (*Le prophète*). In adjusting to embrace these new styles – and later those of middle Verdi, Bizet and Gounod – Costa and both opera houses where he conducted showed that they were not locked in Shaw's 'Donizettian Dark Ages'.

The case for giving Costa a more prominent place in England's musical history is not based on his compositions. The verdict of the *Athenaeum* that they entitle him to 'a respectable place in the second rank' of composers seems unduly generous.⁵⁶ Nor was he, as sometimes stated, the first baton conductor in London. In most of his reforms, he was following in the footsteps of older Continental innovators, applying in England reforms that were overdue. The system of sending deputies to rehearsals, for example, had already been quashed by Nicolai in Vienna. The revised orchestral lay-out was pioneered by many others, including Weber. It was Mendelssohn who first took on the Philharmonic for a full season and introduced the practice of systematically interrupting rehearsals to correct errors.⁵⁷

But, despite these caveats, Costa was the key figure in the impressive leap in musical performance in mid-Victorian England. It was Costa who did more than anyone else to integrate the elements of musical performance, as demanded by the new repertoire; who created the mammoth festivals; who raised the profile of the orchestra and established

⁵⁶ *Athenaeum* (3 May 1884), 576.

⁵⁷ *Morning Post* (14 May 1844).

the novel notion that ‘The orchestra and chorus are the two primary elements of an operatic performance’.⁵⁸ He was one of the first to give serious attention to acoustics. His uniquely long tenure at the major musical institutions in England, which enabled him to modernise and systematise the management and deployment of musical resources, marked ‘a clear turning point in the history of the English conductor’.⁵⁹ It was here that he had something genuinely new and important to say in four crucial respects.

First, as an orchestral reformer. Costa embedded reforms in all the main institutions of musical London: the opera, the Philharmonic and the SHS. These reforms marked a significant stage in the evolution of the music industry in England between 1830 (when there was no professional conductor in England) and 1850 (when the *ILN* announced that ‘the old style of divided authority between leaders and conductors has exploded’).⁶⁰ His system for controlling orchestras and singers was until the 1850s unique to him. Even Jullien, who followed him in using the baton from about 1840, conducted from the middle of the orchestra, faced the audience, used secondary conductors and placed his instruments on a high rake for visual rather than acoustic effect. But Costa’s reforms gradually permeated the country. Halle, who made his London debut in 1854 under Costa at the Philharmonic, followed several of his reforms – baton, lay-out, banning of deputies – in Manchester in the late 1850s.⁶¹ The *Musical World* credited Costa with using his unique influence to set up ‘a standard of efficiency of which every lover of music now reaps the benefit’. The radical nature of this change was pointed out by the

⁵⁸ ROHC, Costa-Gye corr. (27 Jan. 1869).

⁵⁹ Stephen Johnson, ‘The English Tradition’, *Cambridge Companion to Conducting*, 178,

⁶⁰ *ILN* (21 Sept. 1850), 247. Also *MW* (15 Jan. 1853) 31.

⁶¹ Beale, *Charles Halle, a Musical Life*, 61, 64 and 215n.

Musical Chronicle after the Gloucester Festival decided by one vote to appoint a local organist in 1853 instead of Costa:

Conducting an orchestra is a business per se... This sign of the times is so significant that it is plain the old system is doomed... until they place their festival performances under the control of a first-rate leaders they will not have first-rate music... the ability and good intentions of the the present class of conductors is fully appreciated, but it is almost a physical impossibility that they should be able to conduct satisfactorily these varied and important performances.⁶²

Second, on the strength of this system, he was the person who established the profession of the conductor in England. Percy Young wrongly claimed that it was Smart who ‘more than anyone in Britain... established the authority of [the conductor]’.⁶³ But Smart was not primarily a conductor; he functioned under the old regime of divided control and and was regularly upstaged by the leader. Costa was the first to exercise monopoly control over orchestras and choirs by a combination of baton technique, tight management, personality and contractual powers. The story of conducting in England – and Costa’s role in it – would arguably have been different if Mendelssohn or Habeneck had survived to accept the offer of a long term contract with the Philharmonic or if Verdi had taken Lumley’s invitation to stay at Her Majesty’s. Costa, in a sense, filled the space left by these non-events. As the first conductor-manager he became, in the words of the *Athenaeum* obituary, ‘the most conspicuous figure of the musical life in England in the last thirty years’, using his ‘wholly exceptional’ position to achieve success that was described as ‘unique’.⁶⁴ Manns later enjoyed a similar continuity in the narrower context of the Crystal Palace concerts (1855-1901), as did Jakob Zeugheer at the Liverpool Philharmonic (1843-65), but their powers were never as extensive.

⁶² *Morning Chronicle* (17 Sept. 1853).

⁶³ Percy Young, *Beethoven: a Victorian tribute* (London: Denis Dobson, 1976), ix.

⁶⁴ *Athenaeum* (3 May 1884), 576. MW (3 May 1884), 276.

Thirdly, he was the first musician in England to make his career primarily as a conductor rather than as a composer (like Weber, Spontini, Spohr, Mendelssohn and Berlioz) or an instrumentalist (like Moscheles, Halle or Liszt). Costa established that the conductor was a major element in the production process – someone who needed to be forewarned and consulted about performances, rather than an employee who was simply told what to perform. Along with Habeneck in Paris, Chélard in Weimar and Mariani (later) in Bologna, he exemplified a new breed of musician: the professional, full-time and authoritative conductor of other mens' works. Appearing on the platform as neither player nor composer, they had to build their authority on personality, competence and system. Together they resolved authoritatively the debate of the 1830s about whether conductors had an essential role. The *Times* registered the change when it observed, after an inept performance by Walter Macfarren, that 'The business of a conductor is a business of itself, only to be learned by long practice and experience. The highest theoretical cultivation would be insufficient to make – for instance – a Costa...' ⁶⁵ This 'business' – what Boult later called 'the craft of conducting' and Berlioz 'Musical Artisanry' – was developed by a long line of later conductors (Wood, Boult, Walter), distinguished more for their technique than their showmanship or freshness of interpretation. ⁶⁶

Fourth, he established that a professional conductor could enjoy social and economic status. In the early decades of the century, 'the poor conductor... was a mere harmless and necessary figure in a scheme of attractions in which his drawing capacity was not reckoned'. ⁶⁷ From 1840 Costa was recognised as a box-office draw and appeared

⁶⁵ *Times* (3 Jan. 1845).

⁶⁶ Stephen Johnson, 'The English Tradition' in ed. Bowen, *Cambridge Companion to Conducting*, 184.

⁶⁷ Kuhe, *Musical Recollections*, 278.

regularly in curtain calls.⁶⁸ By the late 1860s, his salary at Covent Garden alone was £2,000 and he enjoyed the social status that went with his knighthood – 26 years before Henry Irving received the first theatrical knighthood. In a society increasingly obsessed with respectability and suspicious of the louche world of the opera, he was the key figure in the creation of a climate in which conducting began to be seen as a suitable occupation for English gentlemen.

These four elements justify the description of Costa as England's first conductor. But some elements of his system were personal to him and did not prove to be enduring.

The exclusion of outsiders from Philharmonic rehearsals was reversed on his departure.⁶⁹ An illustration

of Arditi rehearsing at Her Majesty's suggests that

Costa's edict against public attendance at opera

rehearsals did not survive

him at the opera house

(Fig. 10.2). His prohibition

on players sending deputies

to rehearsal was relaxed after

he left the Philharmonic.⁷⁰ His placing of weaker players next to stronger ones became

unnecessary as musical training improved. His control over the musicians' contracts

was ended after his breach with Gye in 1869 and his resignation from the Leeds



Fig.10.2 Arditi conducting an open rehearsal at Her Majesty's Theatre.

⁶⁸ Galkin, *A History of Orchestral Conducting*, xxix.

⁶⁹ Ehrlich, *First Philharmonic*, 108.

⁷⁰ Ehrlich, *First Philharmonic*, 101, note 23.

Festival.⁷¹ The system of continuous tenure was largely abandoned in the next century with the switch to the policy of employing a ‘plurality of conductors’.⁷²

More generally Costa’s system could not survive him intact, because it centralised power unduly on one man and combined ingredients that were incompatible. It was not in the long run possible for a conductor to act as the ally of both managers and musicians. Ultimately, managers had to control the resources that they funded; and the workforce had to defend their pay and conditions collectively. As the music industry diversified and expanded, it ceased to be feasible for a single professional conductor to head four major institutions at once. Costa’s roles were sub-divided between Arditi and others (at the opera), Sterndale Bennett (Philharmonic), Halle (SHS), Sullivan (Leeds), Manns (Handel Festival) and Richter (Birmingham). None of his successors exercised his remarkable concentration of power across the spectrum of opera, concert and oratorio.

His position proved to be an exception rather than the model for the rapidly evolving profession of conducting. The music industry was already moving towards a structure in which greater power was gathered in the hands of managers (and their accountants), the technical stage management team, and the agents and trade unions representing the stars and the rank-and-file musicians. Costa was in many ways a transitional figure between the often amateurish regime of 1830 and the centralised, professional structure that gradually became the norm; and between the time-keepers of the 1830s and the interpretative virtuoso-conductors of the later Romantic period. As Joseph Bennett

71 Spark-Sullivan (14 Feb. 1880), <http://www.leedsfestivalchorus.co.uk/history/conductor-trouble.html>.

72 Ehrlich, *First Philharmonic*, 179.

observed, he ‘stood at the first parting of the ways in the path of orchestral music amongst us, and though he may not have gone far, he led in the right direction’.⁷³

It is easier to assess his role in the structural revolution of the mid-nineteenth-century than to form a balanced judgement of his success and failings as a conductor.

There was little disagreement at the time and later about Costa’s shortcomings. He failed to make the transition from the role of trainer and disciplinarian to that of creative interpreter. He clearly lacked some of the qualities of panache and sensitivity that came to be pre-requisite in a great conductor. He was conspicuously reluctant to promote the evolving repertoire – and may in some ways have deterred others from doing so. Like Spontini and Habeneck, he tended to over-rehearse and lose spontaneity. Although he helped to advance the careers of men like Sullivan, Halle and Cusins (and of singers like Patti and Santley), he was almost incapable of sharing the rostrum with others or of bringing on successors. His lack of flexibility meant that many of his professional relationships ended in acrimony.

Some comparative tests of Costa’s achievement as a conductor were considered in Chapter 5. These suggest that the orchestra at Her Majesty’s under Costa was consistently superior to that of the Philharmonic under other conductors, but inferior to that of Covent Garden when he moved there; that the Opera, the Philharmonic and the SHS all attained a higher level of discipline and efficiency under Costa; that performances of the same orchestra were invariably deemed superior under Costa to those under other conductors (except Mendelssohn and Berlioz); that the profile of the conductor and orchestra rose under Costa to become an important new feature of the

⁷³ Bennett, *Forty Years of Music*, 43.

opera house; and that Costa himself was treated as a benchmark for other conductors and orchestras.

The contemporary verdict on Costa was probably too deferential. Some of the claims made during his lifetime were over-stated: for example the *Times*' description of him as 'the man who by universal consent is the greatest in Europe'⁷⁴. Particular care needs to be exercised about the testimony of friends like Kuhe (that Rossini, Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer 'regarded Costa as a magnificent conductor') and Cox (that Meyerbeer thought him as 'the greatest *chef d'orchestre* in the world').⁷⁵ But the broad conclusion of the evidence from contemporaries is that Costa was a better conductor than his London contemporaries. New Grove rightly remarks on contrast between him and the 'technical ineptness of his contemporaries Bishop, Smart, Balfe and Benedict'. Even the waspish Shaw granted that Costa's 'foremost place' was undisputed, though he qualified this accolade by observing that Costa's was secured 'in the very thin ranks of our conductors'.⁷⁶

It is more difficult to assess how well Costa and his musicians compared with equivalents on the Continent. Allowing for the bias of English and foreign observers, it appears that until the 1840s London orchestras were judged inferior to the leading Continental ones (the Paris Conservatoire, Meiningen, Vienna, Leipzig). But from the late 1840s Costa's bands were rated among the best in Europe. In 1863, the *Times* labelled the Covent Garden orchestra 'the foremost orchestral company in Europe'.⁷⁷

What can be said with confidence is that he was the first conductor in England to have a

⁷⁴ *Times* (17 April 1871).

⁷⁵ Kuhe, *Musical Recollections*, 59. Cox after 1857 festival, quoted in Norris, *Stanford*, 174.

⁷⁶ New Grove 2, vol. 6, 525. *Shaw's Music*, vol. 2, 70.

⁷⁷ *Times* (3 Aug. 1863).

European reputation; and that, until the 1860s, the only English orchestras and choirs held up as potential competitors of those abroad were those run by Costa. It is significant that, at a time when England could afford to import the best from abroad, Costa held the three key English musical institutions without challenge.

Some recent judgements seem over-stated: for example Raymond Leppard's placing of him alongside von Bülow, Richter and Mottl; and Ehrlich's with Berlioz and Wagner.⁷⁸ Costa probably does not measure up, in terms of flair and interpretative creativity, to the greatest continental conductors of the period (Berlioz, Mendelssohn, Richter, von Bülow and Liszt). But contemporary reviews suggest that many well-known conductors in major music centres were inferior to him: notably Padeloup, Hainl and Girard in Paris; Tadolini and Giovanni Bottesini at the *Théâtre-Italien*; Reissiger, Marschner, Schumann and perhaps Wagner in Germany; and all the Italians until Mariani.

The intriguing comparison is with Habeneck, with whom Costa was often equated. Habeneck was a generation older than Costa and reflected earlier habits – such as conducting with the bow from the violin score. Both were autocratic and exigent. Both were seen as 'owning' and personifying their orchestras. Both raised and sustained high standards of performance for several decades. Both were criticised for noise, unduly fast tempi and a literal approach to scores. Both were dismissed by the new wave as cold and out-of-date. On the European scale, Habeneck's orchestra exercised a greater influence, not least for his greater concentration on symphonic conducting and for the polish that came from superior Conservatoire training and long rehearsal. But, unlike Costa, Habeneck did not manage his players or exert himself to defend their interests. And Costa, unlike Habeneck, was not criticised for publicly exposing his players' errors

⁷⁸ Raymond Leppard, *On Music: An Anthology of Critical and Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Lewis (New York: Pro-Am Musical Resources, 1993), 302. Ehrlich, *First Philharmonic*, 95.

or for making conducting errors himself. There are no stories about him to match Berlioz' account of Habeneck ('that able but limited and unreliable conductor') missing an entry in the *Grande Messe des Morts* because he was taking snuff.⁷⁹

Verdi, who had his disputes with Costa and was not given to effusive compliments, was well-placed to compare Costa with his contemporaries. He described him as 'one of the greatest conductors in Europe' and '*un uomo musicale, forte, possente*.'⁸⁰ Verdi wrote that 'one single hand, if secure and powerful, can work miracles. You have seen it with Costa in London; you see it

even more with Mariani in Bologna' (whom Verdi at the time regarded Mariani as the finest conductor in Europe).⁸¹ On hearing from Escudier that Costa's production of *Don Carlos*



Fig. 10.3 Verdi's *Don Carlos* at Covent Garden 1867.

(Fig. 10.2) was superior to that of Paris, he wrote:

So the London production is a success? If it is, what will they say at the *Opéra*, seeing that in London a work is staged in 40 days whereas they take four months. However you are telling me nothing new when you say that Costa is a great conductor...⁸²

⁷⁹ Berlioz, *Memoirs*, 106, 231 and 476. Other examples from Southon, 'L'émergence de la figure du chef d'orchestre'.

⁸⁰ Cesari and Luzio, eds, *I copialettere di Giuseppe Verdi*, (Milan: 1913), 256; and John Warrack, *Oxford D.N.B.* under 'Costa'.

⁸¹ Verdi-Escudier, 'Lettres Inédits de G. Verdi', *Rivista musicale Italiana* 35 (1928), 526.

⁸² Verdi-Escudier (June 1867), Norris, *Stanford*, 175.

Late in their careers, Verdi wrote an unusually conciliatory letter, telling Costa how much he admired his ‘very great genius’.⁸³

Despite the efforts of Carse and others to restore Costa’s reputation, he remains the most forgotten of the major figures in nineteenth-century English music. He was a major figure, in the Darwinian sense that he made a significant evolutionary shift from the defective arrangements that he inherited, thus creating the basis of highly trained and disciplined performance on which future British and foreign conductors were able to build. He was not a heroic figure in the Carlylean sense, which was applied in music almost exclusively to composers. His main achievements were performative rather than creative (or, in Henry Davison’s apt phrase, ‘administrative rather than originaive’).⁸⁴

His career shadowed the failures and achievements of English music in his period, which the composer-writer Thomas Danvers Worgan summed up as: ‘Practically a mountain, scientifically a molehill; sensuously everything, intellectually nothing’.⁸⁵ But, in Johann Gottfried Herder’s sense that each nation has its special genius, Costa and other executive figures like Ella, Hullah, Grove, Halle and Gye, embodied the English musical genius of the period more successfully than the middling composers who have received more attention in the dictionaries.⁸⁶ Herbert Spencer commented that ‘we cannot too much applaud that progress of musical culture which is becoming one of the characteristics of our age’.⁸⁷ He was alluding to the great watershed between the music industry of the early century and the impressive infrastructure of the 1850s – a

83 Verdi-Costa (6 July 1867), eds Hans Nathan and Frances Fink, *Autograph Letters of Musicians at Harvard* (Harvard: Music Library Association, 1948), vol. 5. no. 4, Second Series, 483 and 480-1. Chapter 9.4..

84 Davison, *From Mendelssohn to Wagner*, 108.

85 Thomas Danvers Worgan, quoted in *MW* (17 Feb. 1842), 49.

86 Herder, cited by Anthony D. Smith in *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 75.

87 Herbert Spencer, *On the Origin and Function of Music* (1857), quoted in Einstein, *Music in the Romantic Era*, 342.

revolution in musical management that owed more to Costa than to any other figure. In raising the standards, structures and scale of musical performance, Costa had a leading role in England's greatest musical achievement in this period. It was an achievement that did not meet twentieth-century standards of heroism or originality; but it was secured through the dogged striving for progress against adversity, which Francis Galton (drawing on Herbert Spencer) identified as a key attribute of genius.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into its Laws and Consequences* (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd, 1914), 338.

Appendices

Appendix A: Contracts

A.1 Costa's Contract at Her Majesty's Theatre

There is no extant contract for Costa's twelve years with Laporte, the crucial period from 1829 to 1841 when he built up the power base that he consolidated under later managers. He progressed from *maestro al cembalo* (1830) to 'Director of the Music and at the pianoforte' (1831), 'Director of the Music and Composer' (1834) and 'Director of the Music, Composer and Conductor' (1836).¹ By then, the leader was clearly subordinated to him. In 1837, the *Times* described Costa's position, with some exaggeration, as follows:

His station at the theatre gave him carte blanche for all the ingredients of success with the multitude – he could command with absolute power not only “scenes, dresses and decorations”, but could exact from his orchestra and chorus as much drilling as he found necessary for his purpose...²

The only extant letter from Laporte to Costa shows the latter virtually running the theatre in the manager's absence:

Je mets sous ce plie ma lettre contenant un chèque de 36 livres pour ?Tati. Je te prie de le lui faire endosser pour l'ordre. Sur l'affiche de Samedi qui devra être faite demain soir, ayez soin de faire mettre d'une manière frappante - 'on Thursday April 5 will be presented for the first time in England Donizetti's celebrated opera entitled Lucia di Lammermoor, Principal parts Mad Persiani, Sig Tamburini and Rubini' et dis à Lumley de faire mettre quelques paragraphes dans les journaux afin d'expliquer que si on ne donne pas La Matilde c'est en raison des répartitions de la Lucia, qu'on ne veut pas manquer de donner ?... Je joins aussi un chèque de £10 pour Mlle Smolenski avec qui je ne peux faire le compte qu'à mon retour.³

¹ *Morning Chronicle* (26 Jan. 1831) and (25 Jan. 1834). *Morning Post* (23 Feb. 1836).

² *Times* (19 May 1837).

³ Laporte-Costa (28 March 1838), RAM 2006.939.

Costa's contract at the end of Laporte's management was probably very similar to his 23 January 1845 contract (in French) with Lumley:

Her Majesty's Theatre. Engagement Between the undersigned Mr B Lumley, Director of the Italian Opera, on the one hand, resident at 46 Parliament Street, and Mr Costa, resident at 71 Albany Street, Regent's Park.

It has been agreed and settled as follows:

1. Mr Costa commits himself with Mr Lumley, Director of the Italian Opera, in the capacity of General Director of Music at the Italian Opera and to conduct opera only.
2. Rehearsals in the theatre foyer and the *mise-en-scène* will be ordered by Mr Costa and all the personnel of the opera will be under the immediate command ('direction') of Mr Costa.
3. Mr Costa will receive directly from Mr Lumley the orders necessary for the provision ('service') of the opera according to his competences, it being understood that he will be give the time needed to be able to fulfil them meticulously (*avec soin*)
4. When Mr Costa is commanded by Her Majesty, he will be able to absent himself from the theatre to meet her wishes.
5. Mr Costa will be allowed to undertake any private concerts, provided that this does not disrupt the work of the theatre.
6. On the one hand Mr Costa commits himself to devote all the time necessary and to give his best attention to the welfare and interests of the entrepreneur Mr B Lumley; on the other hand, Mr Lumley will give the necessary instructions so that Mr Costa's arrangements for the functioning of the Opera can be facilitated and respected by all the members of the Italian Opera.
7. Mr Lumley undertakes to pay Mr Costa the sum of £800 in consideration of his labours, payable in five equal instalments for the opera season of 1845, which Mr Costa should receive at the end of each month starting from the opening of the season. It is understood that Mr Costa's name should be announced in the prospectus and in programmes as General Director of Music and Conductor as in the first article of the engagement and as usual.
8. Mr Lumley will give Mr Costa a Benefit Evening at the theatre, which should happen between the last week of the month of May and the end of the month of June, except for the Thursday of Ascot Week, Hampton etc. Mr Lumley will give his consent to the appearance of the principal artistes of the Opera and Ballet in the benefit, the costs of which will fall to him.
9. All cases of *force majeure* are reserved in favour of the Administration.

Done in two copies in London 23 January 1845.

B Lumley. M. Costa.⁴

The evolution of Costa's powers can also be traced through the treatment of conductors in opera and concert bills. Chélaré was not mentioned when he conducted *Der Freischütz* in May 1832 (Fig. 5.1) or his own opera *Macbeth* later that season. The bill also failed to mention Costa as the composer of the evening's ballet, *Une heure à Naples*, though it named Spagnoletti as 'Leader of the Band' and listed the Stage Managers ('MM Broad et Derossi').⁵ As late as 1842, the playbill at Her Majesty's did not mention Costa as the conductor of the opera (*La sonnambula*) or as the composer of the 'new grand ballet Alma'. The playbill for 30 May 1844 announced the name of the choreographer, Deshayes, while again failing to mention the composer (Fig. 5.2). With one exception (Costa's billing as 'Director of the Music, Composer and Conductor' on 14 May 1835) he does not seem to have appeared regularly on the opera playbill until he moved to Covent Garden in 1847.

By contrast, concert notices often named the conductor. In 1828-9, Bochsa was routinely named as the 'conductor' of the opera concerts at the King's Theatre, though his name appeared after that of the leader Spagnoletti. Costa appeared on all the bills for Paganini's concerts in 1831-3 and on many orchestral/operatic benefits (for example at Benedict's Grand Evening Concert of 8 June 1838). Significantly, his name often appeared before that of Spagnoletti. His status as a composer was also recognised in these concerts; the announcement for Fornasari's benefit in 1845, shows Costa as the composer of *Alma*. It was a mark of Costa's success in establishing his profile and authority that his name appears routinely on bills for Philharmonic concerts and performances of the SHS.

⁴ Document in French in the private collection of the late Tony Gasson. Author's translation.

⁵ Playbill in the King's Theatre files (1832) at the London Theatre Museum Archive.

On 3 January 1846, Lumley wrote to Costa in terms which clearly indicated that their relationship had deteriorated to breaking point (Chapter 6):

I return from the continent, confiding in your professions of devotion and, at the eleventh hour, at the eve of beginning the season, as if to leave me without resource, not only I find that, without notice to me, you have four months ago entered into an agreement, against which I have long protested as incompatible with the terms of your past engagement and with your duties at the opera, but that relying upon what might naturally be considered my helpless position, you insist upon forcing on me the production of your operas.

You state that no consideration in the world would induce you to renew your engagement unless I pledge myself to produce operas of your composition at stated intervals. To this I reply that nothing could induce me to give such a pledge.

The practice that composers naturally give to their own works has created an almost invariable practice in Italy of preventing the production, by persons in your position, of works of their own composition; and you know that this forms one of the written rules of the *Académie de Musique* at Paris. In good feeling to you however, I have overlooked this palpable objection, and at an immense sacrifice of time and money, and to the exclusion of other new works, I brought out an opera of your composition which absorbed the time and exhausted the energies of the great artistes to such an extent that, without a further sacrifice in effecting new engagements, I should have been placed in a position of serious difficulty. Besides I am compelled to say that it unfortunately happens that, in spite of your unquestionable musical science, your operas are not popular with the public. *Don Carlos* made no return for the sacrifice made and was performed but five times; and, in spite of my wish, and of what otherwise would have been my interest, I could not give it again without acting in defiance of the general feeling. I must conclude also that it experienced the same want of labour abroad, not having been brought out in any theatre, not even Paris, where it would have been the palpable interest of director and artists to produce an opera already studied.

With respect to your acceptance of an engagement at another establishment – the extent of business at Her Majesty's Theatre demands of its musical director undivided attention...I could only construe this step on your part as a foregone determination to retire from Her Majesty's Theatre, particularly when last year I raised your salary by £200, being the sum you stated was the amount of the salary offered you. [Costa has shown lack of courtesy in not forewarning Lumley, who was ready to increase his salary for 1846 etc]... 'nor could any consideration induce me to reduce this establishment below the level of the most insignificant theatres on the continent, each of which has the exclusive services of a musical director... It does not however prevent me from wishing you success in the service of an institution of so admirable a tendency as that to which you are now devoting your time.

After further private exchanges, the breach became open when Lumley released his original letter to the press on 28 January. Costa replied on the same day, putting his case in a letter to the press.⁶

Mr Lumley having addressed to several papers a copy of a letter he has addressed to me on the subject of my retirement from Her Majesty's Theatre, may I request from you the insertion of the following answer to his statement:

Mr Lumley asserts,

That I abandoned him at the eleventh hour.

That I insisted on the production of my operas as the condition of my engagement.

That I asked for an increase of salary.

That I had, unknown to him, accepted the post of conductor to another 'establishment', meaning the Philharmonic Society.

As to the first charge that I had abandoned Mr Lumley at the last moment. At the close of last season, I was not re-engaged and there was a notice in the hall that all persons not having a written engagement for the ensuing season should consider themselves as not engaged...From the fall of the curtain last August up to the 15th of January, I heard nothing from Mr Lumley in any way.

I never insisted on the production of my operas; but Mr Lumley, having required that I should abandon composition altogether, I resisted such a monstrous exercise of power. No question was raised by me as to the performance of any works of mine for the ensuing season; in fact I have not an opera or ballet in manuscript at this moment. The position of conductor does not however constitute an incompetency to produce operas, as Mr Lumley supposes, and Meyerbeer, Lindpainter, Marschner, Spontini etc have all been and are before the public in the triple capacity of director of music, conductor and composer.

As to the increase of salary, Mr Lumley well knows that the £200 given as an increase last year did not compensate me for my extra services.

Lastly, as to my acceptance of the honourable post of Philharmonic conductor (which only requires the superintendence of eight concerts in the season) Mr Lumley is well aware that at the commencement of the last season I distinctly stated to him my intention of accepting the office, if it should be again proposed to me, though I had twice before been induced by him to decline it. I therefore was fully warranted, and there was no surprise or want of courtesy. I would never have consented to have conducted concerts that I considered prejudicial to the opera's interests.

Having gone through Mr Lumley's assertions, I will not enter into discussion as to his opinions. It would be as egotistical on my part to speak of *Don Carlos* as I

⁶ *Daily News* (30 Jan. 1846).

conceive it indelicate for a manager to criticise the productions of a professor who has been for years named by him, in his own announcements and bills, ‘Director of the music, composer and conductor.’

For the first time, on the 15th of January, Mr Lumley imposes conditions that he knew I could not, as a man of honour, accept. On the 20th of January, as I understand, he makes an engagement with another conductor; on the 23rd he informs me of the fact and on the 28th he brings my name before the public by publishing, without first consulting me, a private communication.

Lumley replied two days later with another public letter. He denied that Costa had forewarned him that he would accept the Philharmonic if re-invited; or that he had tried to stop Costa from composing, especially during the off-season. He argued that Costa could hardly complain about having too much work at Her Majesty’s Theatre while still accepting onerous new duties at the Philharmonic. He repeated the charge that Costa was insisting on the production of his own operas, claiming that he was writing an *opera buffa* to meet the public’s changing taste. (Significantly, he also put into Balfe’s contract a clause binding him not to produce his own operas during the season.) He stated that the notice dismissing those who had not received a new contract was actually suggested and prepared by Costa to deal with recalcitrants in his own department; it could not therefore have applied to Costa himself, who had always drawn up his own engagements. Lumley pertinently pointed out that Costa could not have expected to settle his contract at the end of the previous season since it was usually signed in January or February.

Costa wrote a brief rejoinder, sticking to his version and declining further controversy.

Lumley’s claim that Costa wanted one of his operas or ballets produced each year seems improbable, since Costa wrote no more of either. His argument that the Opera and Philharmonic posts were incompatible was clearly hollow, since Costa combined them successfully for eight years and Balfe was allowed to combine his operatic duties with conducting 12 concerts at the Amateur Music Society. Costa’s counter-claims that

Lumley wanted him to ‘abandon composition altogether’ and failed to hire him in advance of the 1846 season are unconvincing. It was later claimed that they fell out over the precedence that Lumley gave to the ballet.⁷ The *Musical World* saw the dispute as a simple power struggle between two autocrats (Chapter 6).

Ten years later, after the Covent Garden fire in 1856, Lumley wrote to Costa.

Her Majesty’s Theatre is about to reopen. Such an occasion – the commencement of a new era in its history – might be considered by yourself, as it would be by all, propitious for rejoining a theatre wherein your great reputation was acquired. To me it would be gratifying to see you resume your old post. Judging of your feelings by my own, I am sure that anything which a moment’s misintelligence rendered unpleasant in the past will be entirely forgotten.

He records Costa as replying rather stiffly:

I am happy to see you have found that I was the straightforward and the best friend of your interests and those of Her Majesty’s Theatre. At present Mr Gye has my word, which you should know is my bond. If anything should happen in the future, I will be willing to treat with you.⁸

Lumley seems to have pressed his proposal because Costa later told Gye that he had declined a dinner invitation on finding out that it was being arranged to bring him and Lumley together.⁹

A.2 Costa’s Contract at The Philharmonic

Costa’s letter to the Directors in 1845 stated that ‘Long experience in the Direction of the Opera has convinced me that, to ensure the perfect performance of any composition, the entire command of the band is necessary.’ He stipulated six conditions, to which the Directors’ responses appear in brackets below:

⁷ *Birmingham Daily Post* (30 April 1884).

⁸ Lumley, *Reminiscences*, 366.

⁹ Gye, 21 May 1856.

1. The arrangement of the Orchestra to be entirely under my command and the name and title of leader to be done away with. [Costa to have command of the 'entire arrangements of the orchestra *as to the position of the instruments*'.]
2. No performer to absent himself or to leave his place in the orchestra during the rehearsal or performance without my permission. [agreed with addition of 'and that of the Directors'.]
3. The Directors to pledge themselves to support me in the strict discipline of the orchestra. [Agreed].
4. The rehearsal to commence at Eleven instead of Twelve o' clock. [Agreed].
5. The programming to be made out with my concurrence and the score of any new sinfonia to be sent to me a fortnight before the rehearsal. [The Directors would be 'happy to see Sig Costa at their meetings when the programmes are under consideration'.]
6. The right to be absent when summoned by the Queen to conduct elsewhere. [Agreed]¹⁰

Costa replied:

The stipulations I named I consider to be no more than would be required by any conductor really interested in the welfare of the Philharmonic Society and, as I am firmly convinced that no orchestra can go well unless the entire control is placed in the hands of him who is the only responsible person for the accurate performance, and if the Directors do not give me that power, I am of necessity compelled to relinquish the engagement they offer me, but I hope upon reconsideration they will see that all I ask is necessary for the Service of the Institution.¹¹

In the end, he secured most of his demands, though Directors retained control of the programme for their individual concerts and Costa did not have a totally free hand in the hiring and replacement of players (Chapters 8 and 9).

A.3 Costa's Contract at Covent Garden¹²

There is no extant contract for the confused early years of the Royal Italian Opera at Covent Garden. But a contract clearly existed; in 1849 Costa refused to compose pieces

¹⁰ BL RPS MS. 339/234. (11 and 13 Aug. 1845).

¹¹ BL RPS MSS 339/281 and 219 (16 and 20 Aug. 1845).

¹² Except where indicated, all citations are from ROHC, Gye-Costa contracts.

to fill out shorter opera evenings, on the ground that this went beyond his contract.¹³

The Royal Opera House has six drafts, all in English, covering the middle period of Gye's management from 1858 to 1868. One striking feature is their increasingly legalistic language – indicative that they were both anxious to nail down the detail.

Contract of 24 May 1858, signed by Gye: [Ringel states 28 May]

Costa took advantage of the fact that Gye was too ill to resist, threatening to leave the company unless the bed-ridden Gye signed his contract unamended.¹⁴ Gye and his solicitor kept detailed records of these exchanges, which caused lasting bitterness.

1. Mr Costa engages himself & is engaged by Mr Gye to act as Director in Chief of the Music & Conductor & to superintend the *mise-en-scène* of Italian operas only to be performed at the said theatre during the season of 1858 on every Tuesday, Thursday & Saturday Evenings commencing on the 15th day of May and ending on the 15th day of August.
2. Mr Costa is not to accept any Theatrical engagement during the continuance of this agreement but he is at liberty to undertake any public & private Concerts & musical performances except on Opera Evenings.
3. Mr Gye shall pay to Mr Costa for his services for the said period the sum of £1300 by 4 instalments of 325 each the first of such instalments to be paid on the signing hereof & the remaining 3 instalments on the 20th day of June, the 20th day of July & the 20th day of August next respectively.
- 4 Mr Costa is at liberty to absent himself from the Theatre if called away by the Orders of Her Majesty.
5. In case Mr Gye produces any new opera for the first time at Covent Garden or reproduces any opera composed expressly for the said theatre Mr Costa is not to be obliged to rehearse or conduct it except it is the composition of M Meyerbeer or Dr Spohr.
6. In case the use of the Theatre shall be stopped by fire or the death of the Sovereign the salary of Mr Costa shall cease during the necessary continuance of the stoppage occasioned thereby.
7. My Gye is not at liberty to transfer the services of Mr Costa to any other person without his written consent.

¹³ Gye, 2 April 1849.

¹⁴ Gye, 1 June 1858.

8. Mr Gye to cause the orders of Mr Costa for the services of the Theatre in all matters committed as above to his charge to be respected & obeyed.
9. Mr Gye engages to deliver to Mr Costa the engagements signed by him for the Members of the Orchestra & Chorus as last season with such changes & additions of individuals as Mr Costa may in his discretion consider necessary & on the same terms & conditions.
10. Mr Gye is to give Mr Costa the name & order of appearance of every new opera he may intend to bring out at least 6 weeks before the actual performance thereof in order to give Mr Costa time to have it fully rehearsed without interruption & prepared for & also to give Mr Costa a week's notice of every other he may think fit to perform so as to enable Mr Costa to prepare it to his satisfaction.
11. Mr Gye is to deliver to Mr Costa before the 10 [sic] day of May inst. full particulars of the engagements (except as to money matters) of all artistes then engaged & the like as to all artistes engaged afterwards within a week after their engagements.
12. Mr Gye further engages to pay Mr Costa in addition to the before mentioned payments the following sums of money amounting to £400 being the arrears due to Mr Costa for the last season viz: £100 on the signature hereof, £100 on the 1st of June, the 1st July & the 1st of Aug. next & in default of any or either of such payments the whole or the part remaining unpaid shall be forthwith payable by the said Mr Gye.
13. If & whenever any of the above stipulations should not be duly complied with on the part of Mr Gye Mr Costa shall be at liberty to withdraw his services altogether.

Contract for the early 1860s.

Later hand-written amendments to the 1858 contract change the dates from the 1st to 20th in Articles 3 and 12.

Contract of 12 August 1863. [Changes from the 1858 contract are underlined].

1. Mr Costa engages himself & is engaged by Mr Gye to act as Director in Chief of the Music & Conductor & to superintend the *mise-en-scène* of Italian operas only to be performed at the said theatre during the season of 1858 on every Tuesday, Thursday & Saturday Evenings commencing on the 15th day of May and ending on the 15th day of August.
2. Mr Costa is not to accept any Theatrical engagement during the continuance of this agreement but he is at liberty to undertake any public & private Concerts & musical performances except on Opera Evenings.

3. Mr Gye shall pay to Mr Costa for his services for the said period the sum of £1500 by 5 equal instalments videlicet on the first day of April, the first day of May, the first day of June, the first day of July & the first day of August next.
- 4 Mr Costa is at liberty to absent himself from the Theatre if called away by the Orders of Her Majesty.
5. In case Mr Gye produces any new opera for the first time at Covent Garden or reproduces any opera composed expressly for the said theatre Mr Costa is not to be obliged to rehearse or conduct it except it is the composition of M Meyerbeer. [Spohr, who died in 1859, is omitted].
6. In the [sic] case the use of the Theatre shall be stopped by fire or the death of the Sovereign the salary of Mr Costa shall cease during the necessary continuance of the stoppage occasioned thereby.
7. Mr Gye is not at liberty to transfer the services of Mr Costa to any other person without his written consent.
8. Mr Gye to cause the orders of Mr Costa for the services of the Theatre in all matters committed as above to his charge to be respected & obeyed.
9. Mr Gye engages to deliver to Mr Costa before the fifteenth day of March next the engagements signed by him for the same Members of the Orchestra & Chorus as last season with such changes & additions of individuals as Mr Costa may in his discretion consider necessary & on the same terms & conditions.
10. Mr Gye is to give Mr Costa the name & order of appearance of every new opera he may intend to bring out at least 6 weeks before the actual performance thereof in order to give Mr Costa time to have it fully rehearsed without interruption & prepared [for] & also to give Mr Costa a weeks notice of every other opera he may think fit to perform so as to enable Mr Costa to prepare it to his satisfaction.
11. Mr Gye is to deliver to Mr Costa before the fifteenth day of March next full particulars of the engagements (except as to money matters) of all artistes then engaged & the like as to all artistes engaged afterwards within a week after their engagement.
12. Mr Gye further engages to pay Mr Costa in addition to the before mentioned payments the following sums of money amounting to £400 being the arrears due to Mr Costa for the last season viz: £100 on the signature hereof £100 on the 20th of June the 20th July & the 20th of Aug. next & in default of any or either of such payments the whole or the part remaining unpaid shall be forthwith payable by the said Mr Gye.
13. If & whenever any of the above stipulations should not be duly complied with on the part of Mr Gye Mr Costa shall be at liberty to withdraw his services altogether.

Contract of 6 August 1864.

The 1863 contract, signed by Gye and Costa, contains the following manuscript addition: ‘We mutually agree to renew the annexed engagement of the ensuing season of 1865 upon the same terms and conditions in every respect. Dated this 6th day of August 1864.’ Costa’s salary is raised to £1,800.

In 1865, they agreed a new contract which has not survived. Gye recorded that ‘We had a long discussion about clause no 7 – during which he tried all the artful dodges he could to try to get over me and I introduced the words I wished and we both signed’.¹⁵ This contract may have formalised Costa’s commitment to conduct on Mondays.

Contract of 1867.

The changes are underlined in the text below. Four were particularly significant:

- Gye acquired the option of offering productions on Fridays, against a salary increase to £2,000;
- the players’ agreed to continue the salary cut of one-eighth but they gained the right to attend music festivals;
- Costa registered his right to choose the *maestro al piano*, the chorus master and the librarian/copyist and a veto on their removal;
- the ban on outsiders attending pianoforte rehearsals was also formalised.

1. Mr Costa engages himself & is engaged by Mr Gye to act as Director in Chief of the Music & Conductor & to superintend the *mise-en-scène* of Italian operas only to be performed at the said theatre during the season of 1867 on every Monday, Tuesday, Thursday & Saturday Evenings commencing on the 1st day of April next and ending on the 15th day of August next. During the month of June and July, M Gye is to have the option of having Mr Costa’s services on Fridays in lieu of Thursday provided that on such Fridays no general rehearsal takes place.

¹⁵ Gye, 8 and 12 Aug. 1865.

2. Mr Costa is not to accept any Theatrical engagement during the continuance of this agreement but he is at liberty to undertake any public & private Concerts & musical performances except on Opera Evenings.

3. Mr Gye shall pay to Mr Costa for his services for the said period the sum of £2000 for the season by 5 equal instalments videlicet on the first day of April, the first day of May, the first day of June, the first day of July & the first day of August next.

4 Mr Costa is at liberty to absent himself from the Theatre if called away by the Orders of Her Majesty.

5. In case Mr Gye produces any new opera for the first time at Covent Garden or reproduces any opera composed expressly for the said theatre Mr Costa is not to be obliged to rehearse or conduct it. [Meyerbeer and Spohr omitted, since they were dead].

6. In case the use of the Theatre shall be stopped by fire or the death of the Sovereign the salary of Mr Costa shall cease during the necessary continuance of the stoppage occasioned thereby.

7. My Gye is not at liberty to transfer the services of Mr Costa to any other person or persons without his written consent.

8. Mr Gye to cause the orders of Mr Costa for the services of the Theatre in all matters committed [as above] to his charge under this agreement to be respected & obeyed.

9. Mr Costa is to have the exclusive choice of the Maestro al Piano, the Chorus Master, and the Librarian/Copyist for the season and neither of such employees shall be removed from his office without Mr Costa's approval. The engagements of such employees shall be on the same terms and conditions both as regards salary and otherwise as last season.

10. No person shall be present in the room during the pianoforte rehearsals other than the artistes actually engaged therein.

11. Mr Gye engages to deliver to Mr Costa not later than the seventh days of February 1867 engagements [signed by him] for the same Members of the Orchestra & Chorus as last season with such changes & additions of individuals as Mr Costa may in his discretion consider necessary & such engagements shall be on the same terms & conditions as last season, except that the engagements for the members of the orchestra shall contain provisions that they shall be at liberty to attend musical festivals and also that the said Frederick Gye shall have the right at the expiration of the present RIO season to renew such engagements for the season of 1868 and 1869 on the same terms and conditions.

12. Mr Gye is to give Mr Costa the name & order of appearance of every new opera he may intend to bring out at least 6 weeks before the actual performance thereof in order to give Mr Costa time to have it fully rehearsed without interruption & prepared [for] & also to give Mr Costa a weeks notice of every other opera he may think fit to perform so as to enable Mr Costa to prepare it to his satisfaction.

13. Mr Gye is to deliver to Mr Costa before the fifteenth day of March next full particulars of the engagements (except as to money matters) of all artistes then engaged & the like as to all artistes engaged afterwards within a week after their engagement.

14. Mr Gye further engages to pay Mr Costa in addition to the before mentioned payments the following sums of money amounting to £400 being the arrears due to Mr Costa for the last season viz: £100 on the signature hereof £100 on the 20th of June the 20th July & the 20th of Aug. next & in default of any or either of such payments the whole or the part remaining unpaid shall be forthwith payable by the said Mr Gye.

13. If & whenever any of the above stipulations should not be duly complied with on the part of Mr Gye Mr Costa shall be at liberty to withdraw his services altogether.

Contract for 1868.

Pencil amendments on the copy of the 1867 contract appear to show that Gye tried to delete from the following year's contract the contentious 11th clause for 1868. But it was crossed out and 'stet' pencilled in the margin.

A pencilled addition suggests that they agreed a formula which obliged Gye to sign Costa and the musicians by 15 July.

Mr Gye engages to inform Mr Costa on the 15 of July next if he requires his services for the season of 1869 and in such case to deliver to Mr Costa at the end of the present season engagements for the same members of the orchestra and chorus, with such changes and additions of individuals as Mr Costa may in his discretion consider necessary and on the same terms and conditions.

Contract for 1869.

A draft marked 'not to be sent out' appears to contain some of the new provisions which Gye wanted to introduce following his pact with Mapleson. It describes Costa as 'Chief Musical conductor and Composer' (not Musical Director) and commits him to perform at Covent Garden or Her Majesty's Theatre 'as may be required of him' by Gye. It also made the right to terminate the contract for non-fulfillment mutual. It deleted:

- the article freeing Costa from conducting new operas;

- exclusion of outsiders from piano rehearsals;
- reference to ‘additions’ to the orchestra and chorus;
- the players’ right to attend festivals;

Significantly this draft was still between Gye and Costa, not Mapleson, who was in theory to be the new manager. It left unchanged Costa’s right to appoint the musicians and the maestro etc; and Costa remained free to take on non-operatic work provided it does not interfere with his duties at the opera. The main changes are underlined.

1. Mr Costa engages himself & is engaged by Mr Gye to act as Director in Chief of the Music & Conductor & to superintend the *mise-en-scène* of Italian operas only to be performed at the said theatre or at Her Majesty’s Theatre provided the said Frederick Gye becomes the lessee thereof during the season of 1869 during the season of 1867 on every Monday, Tuesday, Thursday & Saturday Evenings commencing on the 1st day of April next and ending on the 15th day of August next. During the month of June and July, My Gye is to have the option of having Mr Costa’s services on Fridays in lieu of Thursday provided that on such Fridays no general rehearsal takes place.
2. Mr Costa is not to accept any Theatrical engagement during the continuance of this agreement but he is at liberty to undertake any public & private Concerts & musical performances except on Opera Evenings.
3. Mr Gye shall pay to Mr Costa for his services for the said period the sum of £2000 for the season by 5 equal instalments videlicet on the first day of April, the first day of May, the first day of June, the first day of July & the first day of August next.
- 4 Mr Costa is at liberty to absent himself from the Theatre if called away by the Orders of Her Majesty.
- [Deleted: In case Mr Gye produces any new opera for the first time at Covent Garden or reproduces any opera composed expressly for the said theatre Mr Costa is not to be obliged to rehearse or conduct it.]
5. In case the use of the Theatre shall be stopped by fire or the death of the Sovereign the salary of Mr Costa shall cease during the necessary continuance of the stoppage occasioned thereby.
6. My Gye is not at liberty to transfer the services of Mr Costa to any other person or persons without his written consent.
7. Mr Gye to cause the orders of Mr Costa for the services of the Theatre in all matters committed [as above] to his charge under this agreement to be respected & obeyed.

8. Mr Costa is to have the exclusive choice of the Maestro al Piano, the Chorus Master, and the Librarian/Copyist for the season and neither of such employees shall be removed from his office without Mr Costa's approval. The engagements of such employees shall be on the same terms and conditions both as regards salary and otherwise as last season.

[Deleted: No person shall be present in the room during the pianoforte rehearsals other than the artistes actually engaged therein.]

9. Mr Gye engages to deliver to Mr Costa not later than the seventh days of February 1869 engagements [signed by him] for the same Members of the Orchestra & Chorus as last season with such changes [& additions] of individuals as Mr Costa may in his discretion consider necessary & such engagements shall be on the same terms & conditions as last season. [Deleted: except that the engagements for the members of the orchestra shall contain provisions that they shall be at liberty to attend musical festivals and also that the said Frederick Gye shall have the right at the expiration of the present RIO season to renew such engagements for the season of 1868 and 1869 on the same terms and conditions.]

10. Mr Gye is to give Mr Costa the name & order of appearance of every new opera he may intend to bring out at least 6 weeks before the actual performance thereof in order to give Mr Costa time to have it fully rehearsed without interruption & prepared [for] & also to give Mr Costa a weeks notice of every other opera he may think fit to perform so as to enable Mr Costa to prepare it to his satisfaction.

11. Mr Gye is to deliver to Mr Costa before the fifteenth day of March next full particulars of the engagements (except as to money matters) of all artistes then engaged & the like as to all artistes engaged afterwards within a week after their engagement.

12. Mr Gye further engages to pay Mr Costa in addition to the before mentioned payments the following sums of money amounting to £400 being the arrears due to Mr Costa for the last season viz: £100 on the signature hereof £100 on the 20th of June the 20th July & the 20th of Aug. next & in default of any or either of such payments the whole or the part remaining unpaid shall be forthwith payable by the said Mr Gye.

13. If & whenever any of the above stipulations should not be duly complied with on the part of Mr Gye Mr Costa shall be at liberty to withdraw his services altogether [in pencil] and in the same way should Mr Costa fail to comply with any of the engagements...then Mr Gye shall be at liberty forthwith to terminate and...of this agreement.

The exchanges leading to Costa's departure are summarised in Chapter 7. At Costa's request, Gye put his terms in writing in a letter of 14 January 1869, spending all the previous day on the draft.¹⁶

¹⁶ ROHC, Gye-Costa corr. (14 Jan. 1869).

My dear Costa.

I have thought that the best way to comply with the request which you made of me when I saw you last week, that is, that I should put in writing 'what I wished you to do next opera season' under the altered circumstances of the junction of the two operas and which I then verbally explained to you, was to write out the engagement which I can offer you. This I have done and enclose it herewith and trust it will be satisfactory to you.

There are of course other matters which it is not necessary to insert in an engagement and which I mentioned to you the other day, such as the intention of having another conductor besides yourself; that the orchestra and chorus should be chosen from those of both operas etc etc.

By this latter I do not mean that any particular member should be chosen from each orchestra or that the choice should be confined to the present members of the two orchestras and chorus alone, but that the best persons, wherever they may be found, should if possible be engaged, so that in your recommendations your field will not be limited. I believe that the new arrangement which I have made will prove advantageous to all concerned and that, if you accept the engagement which I enclose, be assured that I will do all in my power to render your position as agreeable to you as possible and I trust that the 20 years we have been together may receive an addition of many more.

Gye attached a Memorandum of Agreement based on the text set out above, but reinstating Costa's former salary. This contained the main amendments envisaged in the draft contract for 1869. It tactfully did not mention Gye's intention to employ a second conductor. But crucially it transferred to Gye control over the musicians' contracts. Costa could recommend the members of the orchestra and chorus and the *maestro* etc, 'but the terms and conditions of all these engagements (whether he adopt the recommendations of Mr Costa or not) were to be entirely at the discretion of the said Mr Gye'.

1. The said Mr Costa agrees to perform the duties of Chief Musical Conductor and Composer at the Royal Italian Opera or at Her Majesty's Theatre [...] commencing on March 25th and ending on August 15th 1869.
2. The said Mr Costa is not to be obliged to conduct the orchestra for public performances for more than four performances in each week and is not to be obliged to conduct the orchestra for public performances on the Fridays of the months of April and May.
3. The said Mr Costa is not to employ his services in any theatrical or operatic performances during the continuation of this agreement without the permission in

writing of the said Frederick Gye but he is to be at liberty to undertake any public and private concerts or oratorios provided his doing so does not interfere with his duties at [the opera].

4. The said Mr Costa is at liberty to absent himself from the theatre if called away by the Orders of Her Majesty.

5. In case the use of the Theatre shall be stopped by fire or the death of the Sovereign the salary of Mr Costa shall cease during the necessary continuance of the stoppage occasioned thereby.

6. The said Mr Costa agrees on or before the...day of January 1869 to furnish the said Frederick Gye in writing with the names of the musicians for the orchestra also the names of singers for the chorus and also the names of the maestro al piano, the Chorus-master and the Librarian whom he would recommend as being the most fit persons to be engaged in their respective capacities, but the terms and conditions (whether he adopt the recommendations of the said Mr Costa or not are to be entirely at the discretion of the said Frederick Gye.

7. Mr Gye shall pay to Mr Costa for his services for the said period the sum of £2000 for the season by 5 equal installments...

8. The said Mr Costa can be required to work only at the Royal Italian Opera house or Her Majesty's Theatre.

9. [Gye has the option to renew for 1870 and 1871 by notifying Costa 4 months in advance of the season.]

Costa apparently wrote to Gye on 19 January. He did not comment on Gye's proposals but simply stamped his old contract, with one minor amendment, and sent it back for signature.

Gye's reply of 22 January reluctantly conceded that Costa could refuse to conduct certain operas, but stood firm on the key points of authority.

My dear Costa,

I received your letter accompanied by the draft of an engagement, as you propose it, the evening before last.

From what I told you at our last interview, viz on January 2nd, respecting the junction of the two operas, particularly as to several of Mr M's chorus being already engaged, also as to the intended engagement of other persons in his employ as well as the engagement of a second conductor, you will on reflection conclude that it would be impossible for me to sign the engagement which you have sent me.

If after having been together for so many years we are at last to part, I should like that we both clearly see on what grounds we do so.

You do not state to me what are your objections to any one of the clauses in the engagement which I have sent to you on the 14th inst., but simply enclose to me a copy (almost verbatim) of you last year's agreement with one additional condition, viz a condition that you will give your services at HMT in the case that I become lessee thereof, not taking into account the altered circumstances of the opera interests.

I will now go through all the clauses of the agreement which you have sent me & point out those to which I cannot agree.

No. 1 – As there is to be another conductor besides yourself it would not be convenient on all occasions for you to have to perform the duties of the *mise-en-scène* – with regard to your only giving your services at Her Majesty's Theatre in case of my becoming Lessee thereof, that would not be sufficient for I might not be legally considered the Lessee, altho' I may have the command of that theatre – As to you only being obliged to conduct on particular days you will see that in the engagement which I sent to you I left you the Exeter Hall evenings *free* – besides it would, with two conductors, be often impossible to say on what other days your services might be necessary at the Theatre.

No. 2 – There would be no objection to this clause provided that such engagements as you might wish to accept did not interfere with your duties at the opera – As you may well suppose I cannot forget the Crystal Palace affair last year, when the attendance there of my entire orchestra most seriously affected the opera business for nearly a whole week, indeed I believe that we had not a single orchestra rehearsal & that in the very height of our season.

No. 3 – The salary you name is the same which I offered you – As to the dates of the payments I will make them as you desire.

No. 4 – There is no objection to this clause.

No. 5 – As there will now be a second conductor, much as I should have wished you to have conducted a new opera (should one be produced) I will yield this point altho' I am totally at a loss to understand, & I may say I have always been at a loss to understand, how any musical conductor can ask for such a condition – with only one conductor, I would ask what a manager could do in case of a refusal?

No. 6 – This clause can of course stand.

No. 7 – This clause may stand provided it be distinctly understood that I am not now the only person interested in the Royal Italian Opera.

No. 8 – This clause is un-necessary – I should of course cause your orders to be obeyed whenever I found it to my interest to do so.

No. 9 – I cannot agree to this clause – These persons knowing that I have no power over them would not always – & on some occasions have not – obeyed my orders & I will never again place myself in such a position, a position far too humiliating of the head of such an establishment as the Royal Italian Opera – You will not have forgotten that the Chorus some time ago absolutely refused to enter

in their duties unless better conditions were given them, notwithstanding that they had all signed contracts for a term, two years of which were then still unexpired.

No. 10 – I never knew strangers to be present at Piano Forte rehearsals except the relations of the artistes – I never, as a rule, allow strangers to be present as you know, but still I will not place myself in a position to be debarred from taking a friend into the room should I at any time by chance wish to do so – Such a thing can hardly be expected.

No. 11 – I cannot agree to this clause – In the first place several of the chorus are already engaged & it is quite probable that some changes in the Covent Garden Orchestra might be made with advantage now that there will be two orchestras from which to choose; besides there is no reason why the same high salaries should always continue to be paid – The system which you have hitherto adopted of paying a certain salary for a certain instrumental position, no matter what the talent of the occupant may be is, in my opinion very unfair, besides in the event of the death or secession of a member of the orchestra his replacement should be engaged at as moderate a salary as possible and should not be paid a particular amount merely because his predecessor had received it – Such a system may be all very well when an opera has the support of an Imperial purse, as in France & Russia, but not, as in my case, when the whole enormous pecuniary responsibility rests on the shoulders of a private individual.

As to the orchestra having, as you wish, the right to make other engagements I can never again consent to the opera being made a secondary consideration – I have no objection to the members taking engagements which do not interfere with their duties at the opera, but the interests of the opera must be paramount – I would rather engage an entirely fresh orchestra on the continent than submit to the loss and vexation which I have done.

No. 12 – Experience shows that this clause is useless – A director must for his own interest give proper notice.

No. 13 – There is no objection to this.

No. 14 – There is no objection to this except that the liberty to put an end to the agreement must be mutual.

I hope that I have made my intentions clear to you & also that you will feel that I ask nothing that is not most reasonable.

You know how much weight your recommendations, relative to your own department, always have had with me & altho' the form of the engagement which I have offered you may differ from the one which existed between us when I was alone in the management of the opera I still believe that very little difference of opinion would arise between us as to the *personnel* of the engagements.

As to salaries I will never again consent to place the amount entirely out of my own control as I have hitherto done, indeed, having signed an agreement for the joint management of the theatre it now is impossible for me to do so.

If there are any modifications in the engagement which I sent you that you desire, I shall be very happy to meet your views provided they do not affect the principles

I have laid down – I venture however to hope that you will see the whole matter in the same light as I do & that you will, by signing & returning me the engagement which I sent you, unaltered, give me the pleasure of knowing that I am still to have the great advantage of your services.

P.S. I return you herewith the (stamped) engagement which you sent me.

Costa's reply of 27 January 1869 set out his philosophy of orchestral management.

My dear Mr Gye

Although I should have preferred not to follow your example in entering upon any elaborate discussion of the terms of the engagement you propose, still as you have thought proper to do so, I deem it expedient, in order to avoid any misconception hereafter, to place on record the reasons in substance which preclude my adopting any such engagement.

The Director of the music, the conductor and the Superintendent of the *mise-en-scène* is clearly responsible for the efficiency of the performances, and provided he is capable of undertaking the office, it is out of all reason that he should be interfered with or subject to the control of others in the exercise of his functions.

The orchestra and chorus are the two primary elements of an operatic performance and upon their efficiency in a great measure depends the proper execution of any work presented to the public. Hence it is that I have always stipulated for, and had conceded to me, the free selection and uncontrolled direction of both bodies, and the exercise of this authority I cannot think of dispensing with.

As to the arrangements you have apparently made for some combination of the two houses, while I have no desire whatever to interfere in any way, I think it is to be regretted for every reason that you did not previously communicate with me on the practical working, in regard to matters within the functions I have for many years exercised. Had you done so, I should have told you as I now do, that it is beyond human endurance for the same orchestra and chorus to go through the ordeal of a public performance every night, with the rehearsals, which are as you know necessarily incidental to the performances, and this alone is sufficient to demonstrate the impracticability of your projected arrangements. Again, as I have over and over again told you, it is contrary to all principle to expect that the same orchestra and chorus can be efficiently led by two independent conductors.....as well might it be expected that a clock should go with two springs or a battalion be commanded by two colonels.

Applying these principles to the terms of any engagement between us, I cannot consent to any alteration of the clauses to which they apply.

Addressing myself to the observations you make upon each clause, I would observe that as regards no 2, I emphatically deny that the engagement of the orchestra at the Crystal Palace Handel Festival last season in any way interfered with or affected the efficiency of the performances at the opera, There is no pretence for this assertion on your part.

With reference to article 5th, I am very willing to dispense with it.

As regards your observations on clauses 9 and 11 the simple is that, responsible as I alone am for the efficiency of the orchestra, chorus etc etc, I can surely be entrusted with seeing that the members properly perform their duties, and that should they omit to do so, to take the requisite steps to enforce obedience.

No 10 though as I conceive desirable, I am quite prepared to waive *in toto*.

No 14. I am quite agreeable should be mutual.

With these observations, I return the engagement in the form in which I am prepared to accept it.

It would of course be a matter of deep regret to me to leave an Establishment, now of European reputation, to the interest of which I have devoted the best years of my life, but my regard for its reputation, and in justice to myself, I cannot allow myself to be associated with an undertaking where the offices which for so many years I have filled, are subject to the control you seek to impose.

In conclusion I would observe that I am persuaded that the practical results of the engagement you propose would prove as prejudicial to your interest as they are inconsistent with the order, discipline and well working of a large operative establishment.

Requesting you will let me know by the end of the month whether or not you are prepared to accept my engagement in the form I propose, failing which I do not see the utility of further discussion.

Yours very truly.

Gye saw that, although Costa had made 'some trifling concessions,' he insisted on 'all the clauses to which I chiefly objected in the first engagement which he sent me'. Gye's reply of 2 February 1869 'was a long one, ending with the intimation that I must abide by the terms of the engagement which I sent him on Jan 14 except insofar as I modified it by my letter of January 22'.¹⁷

Costa replied on 3 February:

I am in receipt of your letters of the 30th ultimo and the 2nd instant which however in no way alter my views as expressed in mine of the 27th ultimo. Further discussion is useless and I have only now to say that unless my engagement in the form in which I last sent it (and enclosed) is adopted by you in the course of Friday next I shall consider myself at perfect liberty and free from all further negotiation with you.

¹⁷ Gye, 2 Feb. 1869.

Gye wrote again on 8 Feb 1869 (not extant) and, on 11 February, he returned the stamped agreement which Costa had sent him ‘regretting that I could not commit to him the uncontrolled power he sought and that I was obliged to sever a connection which had existed so many years. So I suppose that will close the matter’. He also wrote to Mapleson and that ‘nothing could be done with Costa’.¹⁸

Costa replied in what Gye described as ‘a nasty letter’:

I am in receipt of your letter of the 11th inst, the whole tenor and language of which is only in accordance with the spirit which has prompted you in seeking to impose on me an engagement entirely at variance with that which has existed and worked so successfully for many years. I have never sought an engagement and am egotistical enough to think that the remuneration I have received is if anything inadequate to the services I have rendered.¹⁹

Costa wrote again to Gye on 18 Feb 1869 (not extant).

On 19 February, Costa wrote to the *Daily News* to to correct reports that he had resigned:

I have refused an engagement offered me for the ensuing season, because it differed in several essential respects from the terms which have subsisted for many years. The most material difference was that it sought to deprive me of the independent control which I have so long exercised in the selection and direction of the orchestra and chorus.²⁰

On 23 February, Gye recorded another letter from Costa noting that he had received no reply to his earlier one of the 18th.

On 22 February, ‘A shameful article on the opera appeared in the *Standard* of today’. It later emerged that it was by Gruneisen.

Gye’s last letter to Costa is dated 5 April 1869:

My Dear Costa

¹⁸ Gye, 11 Feb. 1869.

¹⁹ ROHC, Costa-Gye corr. (13 Feb. 1869).

²⁰ *Daily News* (20 Feb. 1869).

I have been searching here for the engagements of the orchestra and chorus of the last and former seasons, but cannot find any of them. Rause tells me that he thinks you have been in the habit of taking them home to your private house. If so, will you be good enough to return them to me.

A very disagreeable circumstance has come to my knowledge which I should very much like to have cleared up. During the period when I let the theatre to Mr Mapleson (last autumn) he asked me to lend him the music of *Dinorah* and I accordingly wrote to Mr Horton (who altho not at that time in my employment had the key of the music library in his possession) and asked him to look out the music and deliver it to Mr Mapleson.

Mr Mapleson has since told me that when he received the score *all the cuts had been removed from it*, apparently with the motive of placing Arditì in difficulty when he came to conduct the opera. I afterwards asked Horton for an explanation of the matter when he confessed that it was himself who had done this. As you may suppose, I reprimanded him severely for such an act as tampering with my music on his own responsibility. He then defended himself by saying that he had not acted on his own responsibility and asserted most positively that *you* had given him orders to remove the cuts! and moreover justified himself by saying that when engaged at the opera he was *your* servant and not mine and that, altho I paid him, his salary came through you. I scarcely like to ask you if you really gave such orders but you will see that I ought to know whether Horton has made use of your name to screen himself from the consequences of such a petty and improper act. A line of reply will very much oblige me.

Yours very truly.²¹

A.4 Orchestra and Chorus contracts

There are two extant contracts for the players in the Covent Garden orchestra:

- Contract dated 21 August 1846 and signed by Persiani and John Ella (see below).²² It commits Ella to perform for three seasons from 1847 for £1 11s 6d per performance;
- Memorandum of Engagement – a draft contract for 1867 on which the players asked Costa to negotiate with Gye (which is printed in full below).²³

The two contracts contained the same essential provisions: the obligation to play wherever required; dismissal by the Director or Musical Director in the event of failing

²¹ ROHC, Gye-Costa corr. (15 April 1869).

²² Ella, Mss 163.

²³ Memorandum of 8 Jan. 1867.

to conform to the regulations of the Theatre, including the undertaking ‘to attend punctually and perform at the rehearsals that may be appointed by the Musical Director’; no payment if the theatre is closed in the event of fire, public calamity or any unavoidable event.

There were however two significant variations which reflect Gye’s struggle to secure a tighter hold over the musicians:

- Absences. The 1846 contract allowed players to be absent only for performances at the Philharmonic and Ancient Concerts; or if they give a week’s notice to Persiani or Costa and show ‘sufficient cause’. By 1866, provision was also made for players to attend SHS concerts, but absences were limited to the evenings of Wednesday and for Fridays evenings in March-May (except for two Fridays during and after Epsom Race week);
- Salary. The 1866 version required the player to sacrifice one-eighth of his pay ‘in order to lend his aid in carrying on the Establishment’.

The timing and content of the orchestra and chorus contracts were closely connected to Costa’s personal contract since one of the main issues in the latter was whether the players could be absent from Covent Garden to perform with Costa at the festivals. Costa’s tactic each year was to refuse to commit until he had the players’ contracts agreed in the form he wished. Gye’s diary charts the often complex manoeuvring between them.

There was an early passage of arms in 1854 when Gye pressed him to sign up in August for the next year. Costa prevaricated.²⁴ A few days later, Costa threatened to quit after Gye had taken for granted that that he would be available for a Monday performance.

²⁴ Gye, 2 Aug. 1854.

Gye calmed him down by the mixture of half-apology and flattery at which he was so accomplished:

Your letter has quite frightened me – I think you forgot that when the Philharmonic closed you were kind enough to say to me ‘*à présent pour tous les lundis je suis à votre service*’ and I did not therefore think it necessary to ask you the favour which otherwise I should have of course done. Do please come and fill that place which no other can as yours. I hope it is not too late to send the tickets for your friends.²⁵

In September, Gye pursued him by letter to the Isle of Wight.

The last time we spoke on the subject, you expressed a doubt whether your health would permit you to undertake any engagement whatever next year. I trust however the rest you have had has done you sufficient good to remove these fears and that you can now tell me Covent Garden will once more have your name on its prospectus. You were kind enough to assure me that, if you accepted any engagement at all, mine should be the one, but still you will see the absolute necessity of my knowing whether I may rely or not on your aid, for should I be deprived of your most invaluable assistance, I ought most certainly to have all possible time to endeavour to find someone to fill that position, which I well know no one can fill as you do.²⁶

Costa remained elusive. In November, he refused to sign his engagement ‘until all the artists had signed theirs’. He also demanded a salary increase from £1100 to £1300 and advance details of all singers and performances for future seasons.²⁷ Gye, evidently alarmed, gave in, but Costa still refused to sign his own contract. After pursuing him without success during December, Gye called at Costa’s house five times in the first two months of 1855 in an effort to pin him down. In late March he wrote to Costa.

If you have filled up the orchestra and chorus engagements, will you please give them to the bearer and I will sign this evening and bring them to your house between 11 and 12 tomorrow morning where, if you have got your agreement from your solicitor. we can sign and seal.²⁸

But Costa stuck to his demands and sent his solicitor (Cotterell) to Gye.

²⁵ ROHC, Gye-Costa corr. (7 Aug. 1854).

²⁶ ROHC, Gye-Costa corr. (28 Sept. 1854).

²⁷ Gye, 16 Nov. 1854.

²⁸ ROHC, Gye-Costa corr. (30 March 1855).

He brought me back all the chorus engagements saying I had made alterations which Costa would not allow!!!...Costa required me first, that is before he signed his own engagement, that I sign all the chorus and band engagements in blank for Costa to fill up afterwards!!! I refused of course.²⁹

Gye demanded to see Costa and the full contracts before he signed them, but Costa insisted through Cotterell that the chorus agreement must remain as it was; he was prepared to insert the salaries before Gye signed, but not the names. Gye, desperate to conclude the contracts so that he could issue the prospectus for the season, gave in. He commented that 'there were one or two in the orchestra whom probably I might not wish to be engaged', but heard later that the two players in question had stayed on for the evening concert.³⁰

This was a critical victory for Costa since it set the pattern for the rest of his time at Covent Garden. In most years there were tussles over some contractual issue. But Gye, more worried about other financial/legal matters, mentions them only briefly in his Diary. It appears that, for most of the period, Gye simply let Costa have his way. By meeting Costa's demands, he was usually able to get his contract signed before the summer break.³¹ Significantly, the musicians' contracts were kept at Costa's residence.³²

The issue of musicians' contracts became more intense again from 1865, when Costa announced that the band would not sign beyond 1866 unless Gye restored the the one-eighth of salary which had been docked in recent years.

The fact was some years ago the salaries of the band were reduced and it was put in the form of a concession on their part. I have often told Costa that it was wrong to do this but of course as usual he took their part.³³

²⁹ Gye, 30 March 1855.

³⁰ Gye, 30 March 1855.

³¹ For example, in 1864 Costa signed on 6 August after receiving his cheque on time. Gye, 30 July and 6 Aug. 1864; 12 Aug. 1865.

³² ROHC, Gye-Costa corr. (5 April 1869).

³³ Gye, 11 Jan. 1865.

Gye tried unsuccessfully to negotiate directly with the players' leader but had to ask Costa to take over.

I should be very much obliged if you would kindly write to him to call on you and speak to him as to the intentions of the musicians...If your lawyer will send your engagement direct to this place, I will sign and return it to you.³⁴

After a meeting at his house, Costa reached an agreement that Gye wanted to publish immediately. But Costa predicted that 'the band was very likely to make some objections' and that he should first send them a proof copy. Meanwhile Costa prevaricated over his own contract, explaining that 'his lawyer was out of town and had not done it. But I suspect he wanted to have the band settled with first'.³⁵

Costa's warning was borne out when seventy of the players addressed a Memorandum to him in January 1867 asking him to negotiate on their behalf with Gye.³⁶ They wanted to freedom to be absent for 'the music festivals' (not solely the SHS) and the restoration of the one-eighth cut if their contracts are renewed. It appears from Gye's Diary that Costa persuaded them again to waive their one-eighth (as he had predicted to Gye) but to insist that any renewal for 1868 and 69 should be 'on the same terms and conditions except that the engagements for the members of the orchestra shall contain certain provisions that they shall be at liberty to attend music festivals' (as Costa wanted).³⁷

Gye settled on this basis and the players on 19 January and 90 contracts were signed on 22 January.³⁸

³⁴ ROHC, Gye-Costa corr. (5 Dec. 1866).

³⁵ Gye, 28 Dec. 1866.

³⁶ Draft engagement with ink amendments, dated 8 Jan. 1867 (printed below).

³⁷ Gye, 22 Jan. 1867.

³⁸ Gye, 19 Jan. 1867.

Gye regularly suspected, probably correctly, that Costa was holding back the players' contracts in order to strengthen his hand over his own – and to force Gye to pay the residue of his salary rather than run it over to the following year. On this occasion, Costa signed his contract three days before the players. But he knew what the latter would be signing and that the chorus contracts remained to be negotiated. He also 'wanted it stated in his contract that he might engage the maestro al piano, the chorus master and the copyist'.³⁹ They signed after Costa 'had introduced new and crotchety clauses. However I made no difficulty'.⁴⁰

Gye managed to reduce the size of the chorus, by sending Costa 80 signed engagements with the request not to retain the three extra singers who had been taken on in recent years. 'My expenses with this season are too great to afford any extra chorus'. The names were apparently left blank for Costa to fill in, because Gye added 'Of course, if the new ones which you have tried last season or the season before are good you will keep them and not engage some of the old ones'.⁴¹

As his financial position worsened, Gye made a further effort to settle the musicians' contracts directly with them in the summer of 1867. He described exultantly in his diary how he had trumped Costa by signing up the orchestra for 1868 without finalising the conductor's contract.

When the engagement with the band was made for this season, they inserted a clause binding me if I wanted them for 1868 to give them notice at the end if this season. This I have no doubt was Costa's doing, he wishing to force me to re-engage him at that time also.

³⁹ Gye, 22 Dec. 1866.

⁴⁰ Gye, 19 Jan. 1867.

⁴¹ ROHC, Gye-Costa corr. (31 Jan. 1867).

Despite Costa's opposition, Gye sent all the players notice of re-engagement at the end of the season.

Last year Costa put off settling with the band for the present season until very late and I know it was because I had not paid him a balance of £200. This year he thought to catch me, and force me to pay him and re-engage him at once but he has been caught in his own trap and the band is now engaged without his intervention.⁴²

Whether or not this marked a victory for Gye, the whole relationship was overturned six months later when Her Majesty's burned down, leading to the Gye-Mapleson monopoly and Costa's departure. Significantly, Gye got the players to renew in 1869 on the basis that Covent Garden would have precedence over any other engagements – and without conceding the one-eighth.

Memorandum of Engagement between Frederick Gye, Director of the RIO and...

The undersigned not having come to an understanding with Mr Gye and being unable to hold any further meetings, beg to enclose you their final and unanimous resolution agreed to on January the 8th and request in case that Mr Gye should consult you on the subject to decide him to accept our fair and full claims for the interest of all parties concerned.

The said...hereby agrees to play and perform in the orchestra of the RIO House Covent Garden either in operas or concerts during the season 1866, and at...such other places where his professional services may be required by the Manager for the time being of the said Theatre, on the following terms, namely...for each performance, which sum the said FG agrees to pay monthly and the said ... undertakes to attend punctually, and perform at the Rehearsals that may be appointed by the Musical Director of the said Theatre for the time being, and to conform to all Regulations of the RIO, and if the said ...in any way fail in fulfilling the Conditions of this Engagement, it shall be lawful for the said FG or the Director of Music to discharge him forthwith.

The said...agrees not to accept any engagement that might interfere with his duties of the RIO.

⁴² Gye, 28 July 1867.

It is agreed that under non circumstances whatever shall it be lawful for the said to refuse his services in the orchestra of the RIO, or wherever the said FG may require his services unless the said...should be incapacitated by illness.

It is understood that this last clause does not apply to the [added in ink: the music festivals or] the evenings of the Wednesdays during the season, nor to the evenings of the Fridays during the months of March, April or May, on which evenings the said ...is at liberty to accept engagements with the SHS to perform at Exeter Hall, except on the Friday in the Epsom Race week and on the Friday in the week following the Epsom Race week, on which nights the services of the said...are also at the disposal of the said FG should he require such services.

It is agreed that, in case of an interruption in the Performances taking place in consequence of fire, public calamity.or any unavoidable cause, then the payment of the salary is to be suspended until the re-opening of the theatre.

In order to lend his aid in carrying on the Establishment of the RIO, Mr...consents to give up his salary for one night in every Eight during the season.

It is also agreed that the said FG has the right to renew the engagement [in ink:at the end of the RIO season] for the seasons 1868 and 1869 [deleted: by paying for the eighth night hitherto deducted; added in ink: on the same terms and conditions.

Dated this...day of...1866.

Contract of John Ella with Covent Garden 1847¹

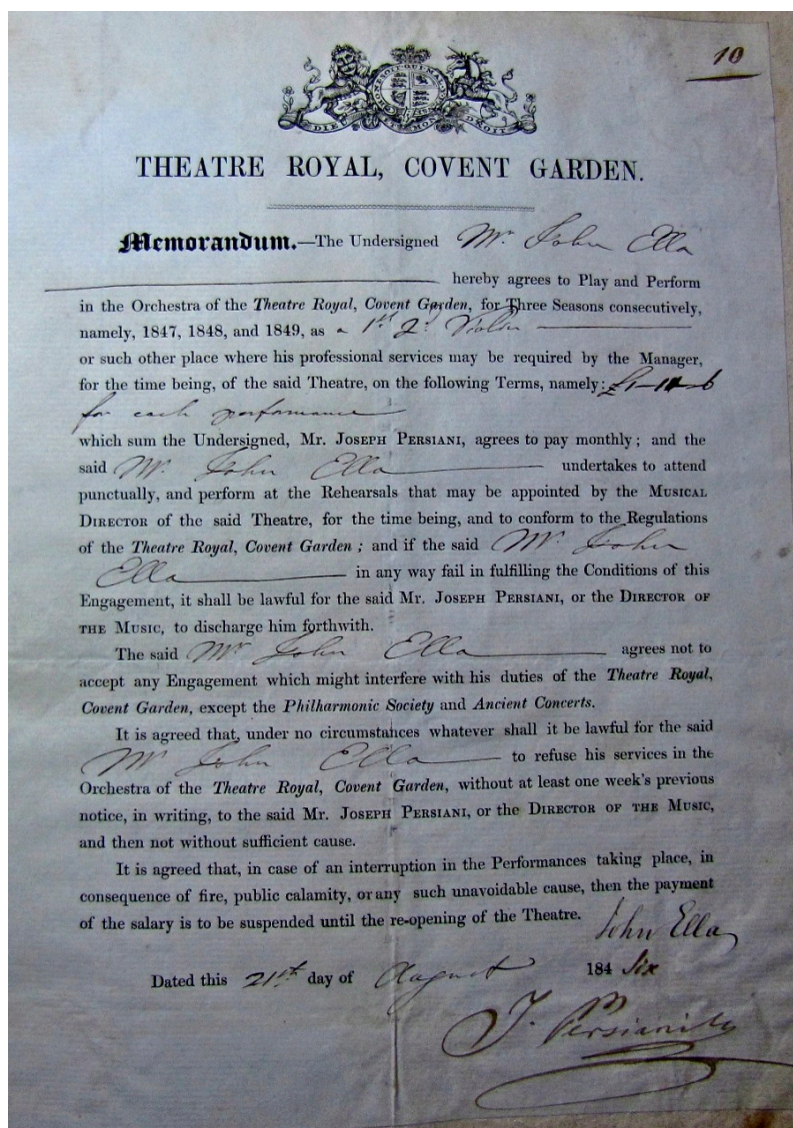


Fig. A. 1 John Ella's contract with Persiani for the new opera venture at Covent Garden (1847-9) (John Ella Collection, Oxford).

¹ Ella Mss 163.

Appendix B: Costa's correspondence

B.1 Correspondence with Gye¹

Gye, 10 Feb. 1851, Berlin

I forgot to tell you in my letter of Saturday that I would rather you did not mention to anyone my having the theatre – in fact as you know it is not yet positively certain – until I have arranged with everyone. There is a capital mezzo-soprano at Hamburg who is in May next engaged here, I heard her sing *La Favorita* and well, I am trying to get her to come after Viardot leaves at the end of the season. She has played *Fides* 48 times. Meyerbeer has also a great opinion of her. I have been quite unable to find Mlle Vera's address, in fact I have again heard that she really was enceinte last season and this may account for her address not being known. In Paris I could hear of no comprimaria; the one here is bad, but I have heard of a good one in Milan and therefore I shall start for the north of Italy tomorrow, as it would be quite useless for me to return home without every arrangement complete...Castellan sings *Norma* tonight. My ideas for operas this season run upon *La Vestale* of Spontini, *Il Flauto Magico*, *L'enfant prodigue*, *Sappho* for Viardot, *Fidelio* (if Mlle Wagner of Hamburg comes) and perhaps *Don Sebastiano* by Donizetti...

PS I have the names of several musicians who could come in case you should have found any difficulty with our people – yet you would of course have written me if any had existed.

Gye, 27 Feb. 1854, Dover.

I am sorry I did not find you at home either yesterday or this morning. I wanted to ask you what music you require of *Matilda di Shabran*? Will you please write and tell me by tomorrow's post to Hotel Bristol, Place Vendome, Paris. I also wanted to ask you whether we could make some reduction in the salaries of the band as some of them are so very high. Don't you think we might get a small reduction perhaps about one eighth. I would not ask it but the expenses are so very great. Will you please try this?...I saw Colonel Phipps this morning and he has sent me the names of several operas some of which certain persons would like given...

Gye, 2 Oct. 1854, Springfield House, Wandsworth Rd.

I am much obliged for your prompt reply and delighted to hear that your health is re-established. You speak in your letter of the management of the theatre these last two seasons, as if complaining of my travelling with a secretary (which I *never* did), and of my filling my pocket with gold! We will *talk* of these things when I have the pleasure of seeing you next.

¹ ROHC, Gye-Costa corr.

Gye, 25 March 1856, Paris.

I have now seen all the artistes who are here and all have in the *kindest* and *most willing* manner agreed to my proposals; these include Mario, Grisi, Gardoni, Bosio, Tagliafico, Luchesi, Graziani etc. I have also had letters from Ney, Marai, and Tamberlik – Lablache has not yet arrived...Calzado will lend me the score, orchestra, chorus and voice parts of *Rigoletto*, *Traviata* and several other operas.

Gye, 3 June 1858, Springfield House. [very shaky writing]

[Thanks for Costa's kind wishes. Gye getting stronger and hope in a few days to be allowed to go to the theatre.] 'I suppose Mario has Alari's alterations in *Don Giovanni*, please ask him about it as Tamberlik will be here the end of the month and it must be done immediately. I think Mlle Parepa had better sing Elvira – what do you think?' Please let me know if there is any problem over doing *Fra Diavolo* on Thursday. Excuse my shaky writing. Very truly yours'.

Gye, 4 June 1858

The Queen will not go to the theatre til late tomorrow and does not want the opera changed, Tuesday – *Barbieri*, Thursday – *Lucrezia*, Saturday – *Fra Diavolo*. This will allow Bosio, Mario and Gardoni to sing at the Crystal Palace on Friday – Parepa, Didiée, Marai, Graziani, etc Would you be kind enough to make out the programme? and as attractive as you can. I need not say how much obliged I should be if you would conduct. Mrs Gye tells me *Lucrezia* went capitally last night'.

Gye, 10 June 58

I shall be delighted to see Ronconi in Leporello. I fear there is no reliance to be placed on Formes. I am very glad you will begin the rehearsals of *Martha* on Monday. Do you think it can be done on Saturday 19th?. It will be *Fra Diavolo* on Tuesday next and *Huguenots* on Thursday. Many thanks for conducting the Crystal Palace concert on Friday.

I will see Alari about *Don Giovanni* (Ronconi's part)

Gye, 15 June 1858. [writing still shaky.]

I arranged with Alary yesterday about *Don Giovanni*, Ronconi's part (Leporello) included. Thus cast the opera ought indeed to be attractive. Please do not forget that I wish Mad. Parepa to sing the part of Elvira. I hear *Fra Diavolo* gave universal satisfaction on Saturday and that the Queen was much pleased. I am getting much stronger and hope to be allowed to go to the theatre on Thursday or Friday. When do you think *Martha* can be played? It is always so much better when a long announcement is made.

Some time ago you spoke to me about a one act comic opera for Ronconi – what was it?

Gye, 15 Oct. 1859 [?57].

You will be glad to hear that Harris has signed his engagement with me. I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you in the course of a few days and have a talk over our proceedings for next season...

Gye, 28 Jan. 1859, Paris.

Many thanks for your letter. I think however that Meyerbeer wants to know what Ronconi's voice is now rather than what it was like when the operas were composed for him...I have remembered that he sang Dandolo in *Zampa* and told Meyerbeer so and this seemed to satisfy him. The opera [*Dinorah*] has only three good parts, Bosio, Graziani and Ronconi...As I had been here several days without seeing anything of Graziani and as I heard he had said he should not go to England at all, I telegraphed De Bassini and engaged him to begin the season. You will be glad to hear that I have also engaged Mad. Lotti. Meyerbeer told he had heard her and liked her very much...Mario is singing very well. I heard Penco in *Matilda di Shabran* and liked her very much more than in *Semiramide*, but her grimaces are dreadful. Didiée sang the contralto part excellently. From all I can hear Lotti will suit us far better than Penco. I think of beginning the season with *La Gazza Ladra*; as the chorus have nothing to do, they might get the music into their heads.

Gye, 31 March 1860, Paris.

Here I am since Saturday and getting on pretty well with my arrangements. Calzado would not allow Graziani to come before May but I have managed to fill his place well. I have engaged Faure of the *Opera Comique*, I don't know whether you have ever heard him. He sang the role of Hoel in *Dinorah*, he has a fine voice, is an excellent actor, young and handsome, a good musician, a professor at the Conservatoire indeed and has great flexibility of voice – sings Assur [*Semiramide*] well; he has determined to leave the French stage and go on the Italian – he will sing with us Hoel, Alfonso (*Favorita*) Fernando in *La Gazza Ladra* etc. I fear Didiée will not be able to come until the end of May as she is not yet *accouchee*. De Meric has only last week unburdened herself of her load, so she can't come to begin the season – how prolific must be the air (or something else) of St Petersburg!! I have not seen the *Orphee* of Gluck. You of course know the music. I did not, but I was *charmed* with it – so old-fashioned yet so fresh. People must go to see Viardot not to hear her – she acted magnificently but her voice – too dreadful to think of! It was most painful to listen to her – not a note left! The role would suit Csillag well and I shall certainly give the work. It is not one which will please all our subscribers but I know the Queen and Prince will be delighted with it...Gardoni will sing Florestan. I have offered an engagement to Calderon for Marcellina. I wrote to Formes to come and play Rocco, but I am sorry to say he is engaged in Germany. We shall begin the season either *Dinorah* or *Fidelio*. Mad. Carvalho and Gardoni will rehearse the music of *Dinorah* with Faure here so that he will come somewhat prepared for your finishing touch. We shall have for the first month of the season therefore *Dinorah*, *Fidelio*, *Fra Diavolo*, *La Favorita* for Grisi's debut – Tamberlik will come later. I hope to be home by the end of the

week. I had not a moment before I left to do the chorus and band engagements. I do not intend having any concerts at the Crystal Palace but, with your assistance, I think of giving in the Floral Hall and the theatre instead.

Gye, 2 May 1861.

I hear everyone is astonished and delighted with *William Tell*.

Gye, 30 Aug. 1861.

I have not been able to do anything about the chorus. I thought of calling a meeting but hear that many are out of town so I shall let matters stand as they are for a short time.

I see the "Emperor of Conductors" has been having another triumph at the Festival! I hope that little Adelina got on well

Gye, 1 Oct. 1864.

I congratulate you with all my heart on the immense success of your oratorio [*Naaman*]. I was in the north of Scotland at the time or should not have missed the Festival.

Gye, 12 Aug. 1866.

I tried to send you a cheque before leaving town, but all the subscribers who owe me money are gone away and I have not been able to get in a penny! As I said however that I would give you a cheque next week, I will send you one and if I cannot give you all, I will at all events a portion. I am very, very sorry not to give you this payment as punctual as I have all the others but I really cannot help it. Believe me.

Gye, 5 Dec. 1866, Burford.

You will remember that at the end of the opera season I saw Howell and ? Sainton at your suggestion about the salaries of the orchestra for next season. Not hearing from Howell as I expected I wrote to him about a fortnight ago and he answered that he would call the Band together and immediately let me know the result. I have not yet heard from him and as the engagements ought now to be made, I should be very much obliged if you would kindly write to him to call on you and speak to him as to the intentions of the musicians.

At the end of last season you told me that your lawyer would send me your own engagement, but i have not received it. May I ask you to be so good as to add the £200 which I owe you to the 5 payments of your next season's engagement...I would not ask this but the concerts have been going on so very badly that Mellon has been obliged to close them much earlier than was intended, which has caused my very large loss.'

As to poor Mellon he seems quite an altered person and I fear not able to manage so large a speculation as the concerts in the Royal Italian Opera. You know I engaged him last opera season to arrange the concerts, programmes etc of the concerts at which our artistes sang, but I am sorry to say he was all but useless – not playing the pianoforte is a very great drawback to him. You have often spoken to me in praise of Bottesini and a few days ago, hearing he was free, I engaged him to attend to the concerts during the next season. He will also, if you want him, teach some of the artists their parts – indeed will make himself generally useful – except that he will not consent to play in the orchestra. From your high opinion of Bottesini's talent am sure you will think this a good agreement...

When you were in Paris, did you hear anything of Verdi's *Don Carlos* or Gounod's *Romeo*? Please give my kindest regards to your brother and believe me very sincerely yours.

If your lawyer will send your engagement direct to this place, I will sign and return it to you.

Gye, 11 Sept. 1867, Inverness

...you entirely mistake the intention and the spirit with which I wrote to you: I only was induced to allude to the circumstances which I did in order to answer the accusation which you made against me of having treated you with neglect. I felt that the charge [was] so entirely undeserved that I could not allow it to pass unnoticed, and I only said what I did in order to show you that it was unfounded.

All I can say is that I will endeavour to acquit my obligations towards you at the earliest possible moment.

For the correspondence leading to Costa's departure from Covent Garden, see Chapter 7 and Appendix A.

B.2 Correspondence with Bartholomew²

Costa, 6 Nov. 1857. Crouch Oak, Addlestone. In French (author's translation). RCMA 3005.

Mon cher Mr Bartholomew

I have caught cold and feel a bit unwell. Today there were at least seven inches of snow. I have arranged everything with the musicians. I have talked with them about Mendelssohn's *Christus* and they decree (?) that it should be performed for the first time by them. The Festival will be on a very grand scale...because the

² William Bartholomew (1793-1867), translator of Mendelssohn's chief works, including *Elijah* and librettist of Costa's *Eli* and *Naaman*. Also violinist, chemist, hymn-writer, flower-painter. Married the organist Miss Mounsey. Portrait in F.G. Edwards, *Mendelssohn's Oratorio Elijah*, (London: Novello, 1896). References are to the RCMA's volume II of Letters.

Committee decides to have a more amplified orchestra and chorus...[details when we meet next Tuesday. and dine 'sans facon' Wednesday].

Votre très dévoué ami.

Costa, 7 Oct. 1858. Corneilles-en-Parisis, Seine et Oise, par Francoinville. Chez M

Castellan. RCMA 3009.

I am thank you very well but I feel very often very bilious. I think it is the air. I walk constantly and regularly therefore I can only attribute the bile to the air...I went last week to hear Auber's opera *La Pacte du Diable* and was very pleased. And the night before last I went to a French pantomime. I can assure you I was very much amused, and capitally done and full of incidents.' [Plans to go to Fontainebleau] then start to dear England, the real home before the last, where I hope to go not so soon, but as late as possible, though they say Paradise is the best place, but I hope to be convinced of that as late as possible.

Costa, 8 Oct. 1859. Ventnor. RCMA 3006.

My dear friend.

I have last Friday completed the following pieces: Overture, *Blow up*, Chorus *Let us go*, Recitative *Behold*, Prayer and chorus *O let the people*, Chorus *Blessed be the Lord*...

You must know that I have burnt all what I did before and composed a new music on a different plan and I think for the better. I begin to reconcile [sic] myself with prose – but my dear friend it is very difficult for me, being a ? Marmot in point of English language to compose music without poetry – but we must work and I must not grumble. I find Walker's Dictionary very useful and at the end it contains a key to the pronunciation of Greek, Latin and Scripture proper names...On my arrival in town I must plague with a long hearing and setting. And I hope that you will tell me frankly what you think of my rubbish.

Costa, 11 Dec. 1860. Worthing. RCMA 3010

My dearest Barty

I have Thank God finished the Triumphal March, it has cost me a great deal of trouble. I have also done the recitatives!! And the trio preceding the March. Now I must beg of you to be so good as to add another stanza or two to Naaman's song 'Invoking Death' because the present beautiful words will not bear much repetition and as I intend to have a sort of Agitato, would be as well (If you think it proper) to have something calm; I might repeat the first two stanzas again, but that I leave entirely to you. I will not expect my request to be granted soon, take your time. I have to score the trio and the March, and if the words do not arrive in time, I shall do Elisha's song.

...the days are so short and I only go up [to London] for the performance of Exeter Hall and leave next morning by the first express.

Costa, 13 Aug. 1862. (black-edged). RCMA 3012.

...my heart is with you and be sure that I cannot easily forget my best friend and ‘collaborator’...after the opening of the Exhibition I will have the gratification to go and squeeze you in my arms...Believe me, my dear Signor Barty...

Costa, 24 Dec. 1862. RCMA 3013. Replying to Bartholomew’s complaint when Costa asked to change a sentence in the libretto of his oratorio *Naaman*.

I say Barty! What the Dickens do you mean by telling me that you wrote like a Christian? Do you mean that I compose like a Turk? What I know is that I am a very good Christian and you are the greatest Turk [that] ever lived. Blow me! if I think the contrary If I suggested to finish the song with other words, the reason was simply that, with the exclamation “God comfort and save me from dismay”, the finale of the song would be interrupted, and if I succeed with the music it will scarcely be heard out of a public performance and will be excluded from the drawing room, eg the two prayers in our former oratorio *Eli*. The Morning Prayer has been sold and sell 10 times more than the Evening Prayer (though the public like the tune of the EP better than the MP) Why? Because it concludes satisfactory [sic] for their ears, the other though 50 times more effective for the situation in a public performance does not sell so well. That was my only reason for asking your “Highness” to alter the last line. But as you, Sir, have most grossly insulted me, I shall set to music the former one and will not on any account accept anything else. And in allowing you to prove to the public that you write not like a Turk but as a Christian, I shall prove to the World that I compose not only like a very good Christian but as an Angel. Your most humble and very obedient servant, Mike.

Costa, 16 Nov. ?1863. RCMA 3016.

...I like to adapt the music to the words and not the words to the music. A march must have a decided rhythm – Triumphal, Ancient, Sacred Military etc ...don’t imagine for a moment that I will copy myself even for a bar, but if I have the happiness to finish the new oratorio you will see that it will be quite different in stile [sic] and colouring from the other...

Costa, 8 Dec. 1863. RCMA 3017.

I have after great trouble done the ‘Mesmeric’ scene and the Child’s song! I wish I could have a boy to sing it. I believe it will rival the evening prayer in our *Eli*...I don’t know why in singing this blessed song I am suffocated by tears. The words are so touching!

Costa, 24 December 1863. RCMA 3018.

My dear Special Pleader,

I have received this morning your 'double knock' and in answer to it I beg most humbly to inform you that it is my intention, when I go up to town again, to kill you!!! Therefore provide yourself with a revolver. In interim, as a good Christian, I wish you and all your dears a Happy Christmas and New Year...Believe me, my dearest Barty, our affectionate old friend and newly Christened Signor Goosey.'

Costa, 13 Nov. 1864. Grand Hotel Paris. RCMA 3029.

I have been here a week and feel very much better, both in health and spirits. I have visited the theatres and other musical societies. But I have to say, nothing to compare with our dear old England. The other theatres and places of amusement are better than ours. Rossini is very well and full of fun, but he cannot conceive how I compose music in prose instead of verse. Dear Auber is getting very old. At the Grand Opera they are rehearsing Meyerbeer's new opera *L'Africaine*. I have heard a rehearsal and I think there are several beauties. Yesterday I dined at Patti's and after dinner little Adelina sang two songs in *Naaman* magnificently to a very crowded drawing room and delighted everybody. She has signed her name in your book.

Paris my dear Barty is the finest city I know. You cannot form an idea of the beauty of their streets, shops, palaces, gardens etc only is precious dear, near the double of London. Next Thursday, Mme. Carvalho has promised me the first representation of M. Gounod's last opera *Mireille*. Rearranged and improved...

Costa, 25 Dec. 1864. Folkestone. RCMA 3021.

Amen

My dearest Barty

Thank God the last chorus is composed. I have been up all the night and of course I am tired and my head is giddy, but I shall not now return to score it for a few days I want rest...I feel so relieved, thank God again and again.

Costa, 26 Dec. 1864. RCMA 3030.

...The chorus is going well but 'you will forgive me the remark that the "Father, Son and Holy Ghost" have nothing to do with the old Testament'.

Costa, 20 May 1865. RCMA 3033.

[First performance a success, with five encores, despite 'the misfortune of Mr Sims Reeves' absence']. Cummings [the substitute tenor] sang very well and was encored. Santley sang splendidly and encored. Dolby has tremendous encore. Prayer 'Maker of every Place?' encored] I am sure you must have heard it at 31 Brunswick Place...The announcement of Adelina Patti next Friday made

everybody very happy. [Lots of copies seem to have been sold] because I very often heard the turning of their leaves.

Costa, 26 May 1865. RCMA 3044.

My dear Barty,

[Mrs Bartholomew had pointed out a change which should be made in *Naaman*. Costa agreed in principle, but]...I cannot at this moment of labour and anxiety do it. I am quite worn out of fatigue and really if God does not help me I am doomed...if I am better after the season I will try to compose another cantabile, though not a better one, but never mind. If I can I will do it. You must not quote Mendelssohn, he had nothing to do but compose music, but I am dead with fatigue and anxiety Yours in haste...

Costa, 23 April 1866. RCMA 3036.

...How can you imagine for a single moment that I should take offence? What for? I simply thought that you made a mistake. Please be not a goose again, and love your M Costa.

B.3 Correspondence with Rossini³

The most-quoted reference to Costa is Rossini's jocular comparison of a Stilton cheese with Costa's score for *Naaman*.⁴ The implication that he was a pedestrian composer was doubly damaging, because it was both funny and true. In fact, Rossini's thank-you letter to Costa protested:

how much I like you and how high is my consideration for your genius and musical expertise. If you were to write another oratorio like the one you sent me, it will add to your growing fame as successor to Handel (the Colossus) and Haydn (the Enchanter). Your sincere friend Rossini.⁵

Costa was of course only one of many victims of Rossini's brittle wit: he described Auber as '*un gran musicista che fa della piccolo musica*'. But what is ironical about this episode is that his extensive correspondence with Costa reveals a relationship that was uniquely close for both of them. There are 44 letters from Rossini covering the period

³ The following translations are from Frank Walker, 'Rossiana in the Piancastelli Collection', *Monthly Musical Record*, vol. XC (1960), 203 et seq.

⁴ Chapter 9.4

⁵ Rossini-Costa (5 Nov. 1856), RCM letters 2217.

from 1836 until five months before his death in November 1868.⁶ Many are routine letters of introduction for musicians whom Rossini asks Costa to help in London. Initially Rossini addresses him conventionally as ‘My most esteemed friend’, as he did when writing to Arditi and others. But by 1857, Rossini is writing to ‘My dearest son’ and signs off ‘Your most tender father’. Variants of this (‘My adored son’) continue through the series, with Costa replying ‘My dearest Papa’.⁷ Throughout the letters, Rossini’s tone is deeply affectionate, using language that does not appear in his letters to other musicians.⁸ The Italian editor of the letters is ‘flabbergasted’ by his language, which he describes as so poetic as to be almost ridiculous. Like Frank Walker, he speculates that the childless Rossini saw Costa as a surrogate son.⁹

He teased Costa about his ‘despotic character’ (12 Sept. 1842). His tone is sometimes humorously peremptory, as when he chides Costa for omitting to visit his ‘father’ when in Paris 911 Nov. 1860). Rossini sustains some elaborate jokes. He writes as from ‘the High Priest of the Temple of Music in Paris’ to ‘the Pope of the Temple of Music in London’ (2 June 1859). In two letters he jokes that visiting London and not meeting Costa is like going to Rome and not seeing the Pope. He passes on gossip, for example that Carafa, despite his eighty years, was still chasing the ballerinas. He also asks Costa’s frank opinion of Verdi’s *Don Carlos*, which Costa conducted in 1867-8 – adding mischievously ‘you know how discreet I can be’. (28 July 1867).

6 Texts in Cia Carlini, *Gioacchino Rossini Lettere agli Amici* (Istituto Culturali della Citta di Forli, 1993).

7 The only extant reply from Costa, attached to one from Rossini of 28 July 1867.

8 He addressed Arditi as ‘Carissimo Arditi’ and signed ‘Your affectionate admirer.’ Arditi, *Reminiscences*, 117. Rossini took a deep friendly interest in the Russian tenor, Nikolay Ivanoff (1810-77), who sang in Paris and London before settling in Bologna in 1852. Rossini addresses him as ‘Dearest friend’ and ‘Your affectionate friend’, but does not use the paternal and emotional tone that appears in the Costa letters.

9 Carlini, *Lettere*, 31-3. Walker, ‘Rossiana’, 204.

Rossini was solicitous about Costa's health and, at a time when Rossini was too unwell to complete his *Petite Messe Solonelle*, he put himself to great trouble to secure a performance in Paris, with the best cast and orchestra, of 'our oratorio' *Naaman*, which Costa dedicated to Rossini (12 July 1866). When Costa was accused of blocking the performance of Verdi's *Hymn of the Nations* at the 1862 Exhibition, Rossini writes that he has 'broken not a few lances' in defending Costa's side of the story (20 June 1862).¹⁰

Costa wrote frequently from Paris about his meetings with Rossini and the autograph snatches of Rossini scores he has obtained for his London friends. In 1864, Costa reported that 'Rossini is well and full of fun, but he cannot conceive how I compose music in prose instead of verse'. As the relationship developed, Rossini added affectionate greetings from his wife, Olympe Pelissier and warm references to Costa's brother Raphael. Costa emerged from his sick-room to conduct the *Stabat Mater* to mark his friend's death.¹¹

Bologna, 12 Sept. 1842.

My most esteemed friend,

'Tis Liverani, my sweet friend, who will hand you this. He has done his duty in coming to put himself at your service in the Great Capital. Now you have a duty to fulfil and that is to put him in the way of earning some guineas of which he has a great need!

I demand of your omnipotence and friendship that you secure for him all necessary means of giving a Magnificent Concert in the High Season. I demand further that you impose him on those Noble Milords, for their Private Musical Entertainments called Concerts in the style of Puzzi and Dragonetti. He will let slip, from his clarinet or his tongue, an occasional note out of tune or word out of season. What does it matter? As long as the money comes in, you can leave the rest to me! You will find my manner of writing strange. It is to tell the truth somewhat imperative. How can I help it? The unexpected success of my *Stabat Mater* has wholly gone to my head and I have become a Nero. You have a feeling heart and a despotic character; everyone obeys your orders, how should I not hope

¹⁰ Rossini, 20 June 1862.

¹¹ Cox, *Musical Recollections*, vol. 2, 277.

then on behalf of my good Liverani? I recommend him also to Mr Lumley, whom I saw at Bologna. Be happy, fulfil my wishes, and believe me,

Your wholly affectionate G Rossini.

Paris, 2 June 1859.

From one of the High Priests of the Temple of Music in Paris to the Supreme Pontiff of the Temple of Music in London [asking him to help Miolan-Cavalho].

Paris, 27 March 1860.

My dearest son,

The celebrated Belgian violincellist Servais, the true Paganini of the violincello, is uncertain about crossing the Channel and coming to make himself known in England, out of modesty, which I find exaggerated, and fear of not covering the expenses inevitable on such a trip. Now I want you to tell me, with your usual frankness and delicacy, if Servais comes to London he will be able, with your wise advice and under your protection, to employ advantageously his Immense Talent. He is pretty rich already and his needs are not such as could render him importunate to those who are pleased to protect him. If you will let me have an early reply, you will oblige me beyond measure and I will establish new claims to the gratitude of

Your most affectionate Father,

G Rossini

Embrace your good brother.

Paris, 11 Nov. 1860.

Dearest Son

[Zani wants to meet 'the Holy Father of English Music']...I will not reprove you for failing to make your annual visit to your poor father, because you are so busy in those works which will increase your fame and bring the greatest pleasure to

Your most affectionate father,

Passy, 7 Oct. 1861.

Dearest Son, Colleague and Friend,

I know that you love me; I am proud of it and come now to ask a further proof of your affection. You will not be unaware that in the Spring of 1853 there was performed at the Teatro Apollo in Rome a magisterial work by the renowned composer Pietro Raimondi, with the following title: Giuseppe

[His family need help – publication or performance in London?]

Almighty as you are, respected, loved, obeyed by all, a simple stroke of your baton (worth more than that of Moses) would suffice to put into execution my second suggestion, which might serve as a step towards the first. You will probably say that without the score before your eyes, you cannot judge its importance and utility. I myself don't know these dramas, but I know what Raimondi was capable of in that field, I know of the great success and I have recently had news from people who sang in the performance. All these things make me sure I shan't have led you to a false step if your heart decides to lend itself to this Sacred Enterprise. Pressed as I am from Rome, I shall welcome a categorical reply from you and if this expresses agreement (so far as is possible at the moment) you will make many people happy and show yourself still more worthy to have for father

Your wholly affectionate Father.

PS...My wife wishes to be remembered to you. Embrace your brother affectionately for me. Can you read it?

Paris, 11 December 1861.

...I know you are busy with your new oratorio; I commend you for the speciality to which you devote yourself; the worth and success of *Eli* are pledges of your glorious future...I embrace you with the tenderness of the sweetest father in the world,

Passy, 20 June 1862.

Dearest Son

I cannot leave your most welcome letter of the 17th without reply. The kind things you say about the two Gems (so-called) I attribute to your filial affection and not to the worth of the pieces; it is certain that the most mediocre music acquires a certain value when played by that wretch Thalberg (a Singing pianist). Thanks to him then, and to you, who are always indulgent to me.

The hope you give me of being able to embrace you in the coming August has filled my soul with gladness. Heaven grant that nothing may prevent the realisation of so welcome a project.

I have broken not a few lances in your defence, on account of rumours going about, relative to Verdi's Cantata. The love I bear you and the esteem in which I hold you imposed it on me. My wife reciprocates your kind regards. Embrace your good Brother and believe me that no one is more warmly affectionate towards you than your too tender Father,

G Rossini

Pianist of the fourth class.

Paris, 31 March 1863.

Just as those going to Rome are desperate to see the Pope, Traventi wishes to meet the Supreme Patriarch Costa...

Paris, 3 Jan. 1865.

My Adored Son

I have delayed writing to you because my poor state of health did not permit me to taste your precious gift of Stilton. Today, reinvigorated by that delicious cheese and with its taste still in my mouth, I come to offer you my feelings of warmest gratitude, from my Stomach and my Heart. I am now more than ever confirmed in my opinion that often eating Stilton (as I suppose you to do) you are bound to compose classical Oratorios and go trotting down to Posterity with your brow crowned with Laurels. Continue then, beloved son, in this speciality which renders you Unique and thus be the Glory of your Country and your father's Consolation.

I want you to do me a great favour – this is what it is: a very dear friend of mine, Count Mattei of Bologna, is Inventor of a Medicine made from herbs, which if applied in time achieves Miraculous Cures of Cancerous Maladies. Mattei is not a doctor and still less a Charlatan; he is guided solely by Noble Philanthropic Sentiments for the good of Humanity, you understand! The favour I ask of you is only kindly to ask your dear doctor if it is true that there is in London a Special Hospital for Cancerous Maladies and what is its name and address. Be zealous, I beg you, in doing me this service. If such a thing exists, Mattei would like to make a few Experiments. Take note that your doctor would greatly profit from this affair! Here in Paris, I have relieved a number of unfortunates who were on their way to the other world and I can assure you of the prodigious efficacy of this liquid. I know your kind heart and do not doubt that you will do me this favour. My wife joins me in wishing you, in the year just begun, full measure of Contentment, Corporal and Spiritual.

I am always happy to call myself

Your Affectionate Father

Paris, 5 Aug. 1865.

My dearest Son

Just a few lines to convey my Joy at being able to embrace your Good Brother and his bringing me the oratorio (which has so augmented your Fame) together with your letter. The promises you make me in it are true Balsam to my Paternal Heart. Continue then in this Oratorical Speciality of yours and write a third one, in the certainty that *Trinum est perfectum*. Choose a good subject, work on it without a word to anyone, and if you are satisfied with your work, in three years time, and not before, let it see the light. Three years are needed to confirm the fame of your

Naaman otherwise, as the proverb says, one will smash the other! It is not given to us to change the nature of Swinish Humanity! I have a friend who knows English well and who will help me to read your *Naaman*. As you can well believe, the feeling that predominates in such a reading is not mere Curiosity but rather true Joy, for him who will always be glad to call himself,

Your Affectionate Father

PS My wife returns your greetings. La Patti, who came to see me with Banners and Train, gave me news of you.

28 May 1866.

The cheese sent me would be worthy of a Bach, a Handel, a Cimarosa, let alone the old man of Pesaro...For three consecutive days, I tasted it and moistened it with the best wines in my cellar...and I swear I never ate better food than your chedor Chiese (cursed be the Britannic Spelling!)

Passy, 12 July 1866.

My Beloved Son

Don't be alarmed by my hand-writing – it's a question of putting into execution an idea that is constantly galloping round my head. Listen!...

A certain Mr Bischoffshein, a Very Rich Banker, (the Father of Madame Beer whose husband is a composer and the nephew of the late Meyerbeer) has built a Grand Hotel behind the new Opera House. This gentleman has had the noble idea of devoting part of his building to a Concert Hall. The said hall is larger than that of the Imperial Conservatoire, which you must know. The opening up is to take place in October or November next. The celebrated Padeloup is entrusted with the organisation of the concerts that are to be given in the said hall, in which there is a magnificent Organ, which the Rich Banker has had built and which I have heard and found to be excellent! I mention these particulars so that you may see that it is not a question of giving concerts by pianists or flautists on this new site, but rather Grandiose Things – that is to say, Oratorios, cantatas, psalms etc etc. Would it be agreeable to you and convenient to allow the Parisians to hear your latest Oratorio? I will tell you in all confidence that I have had a word about it with the above-mentioned Padeloup. As you can well imagine, not knowing my intentions, he was non-committal, and that is natural enough since I touched on this matter with great Diplomacy. Now reply promptly and categorically to the following questions:

1. Would you like to have your Oratorio performed in Paris and to conduct it yourself in the coming Autumn?
2. Can you be sure of securing for the performance of your beautiful work the services of Adelina Patti?
3. Will you undertake to have your Oratorio translated into Italian?

4. Will you indicate to me (knowing Mr Bergier's company in Paris) which artists you would like as Patti's companions?

I await your reply with impatience.

I can assure you that Mr Padeloup's orchestra is excellent, and that the chorus will be formed from the best singers in Paris.

Please don't mention a word of this to anybody (except your brother). If you authorise me to go ahead with this undertaking, you will see how warmly affectionate is

Your Tender Father.

Passy, 22 July 1866.

Dearest Colleague and Son

As soon as I received your letter of the 16th, I sent M Padeloup and the bard Pacini an invitation to lunch. These gentlemen, as you can well imagine, honoured me with their Mastication, after which I took Pacini aside to learn whether he was prepared to translate our oratorio into French and what sort of fees he would ask. The sum of 500 francs was agreed upon after the exchange of a few words. What do you think? You must send me the English text (which I presume is printed) at once, so that we can set to work. With Padeloup I was more reserved, since before tying myself down, I want to be sure of an ensemble worthy of us, for the performance of the music, and the best that is possible in Paris – as regards orchestra and chorus, of course, for the star on whom we must count is Adelina of My Heart.

Where is Madame Sainton the Contralto? I don't know her and I don't know if she is with Bagier. My friend Faure and Niccolini will be excellent and I want the Crown of Artists to be worthy of us, eh?

I am counting on seeing Mr Bischoffshein, Proprietor of the Hall, to settle things formally; on your arrival (which I have promised myself next month) it will all be arranged to your satisfaction, I am sure. We must be reserved for a little longer, since it is my habit to walk with Leaden Feet!...

Your Affectionate

Paris, 17 Nov. 1866.

My Beloved Son

I intended to write to you before this, but have been prevented by a rather serious illness. Now I'll tell you that in a few days, the Bischoffshein hall is to open. Then I shall know whether it is acoustically suitable for music and I will write to you. I shall also know definitely whether, for our oratorio, we can count on the collaboration of Patti and Faure indispensable to us. Ask your brother to let me know about my watch, which he had the kindness to take with him on his return to

London. I am uncommonly laconic because I am barely convalescent. I want you to know, however, that no one feels more affection for you than

Rossini

Paris, 29 Nov. 1866.

My Beloved Son,

Although still unwell, I am writing to let you now about a conversation which I had yesterday with the celebrated Strakosch. He tells me that M Bagier, Director of the Theatre Italien, is still hesitating about promising Adelina Patti permission to sing in your Oratorio in Bischofseine (sic) Hall, adding that he would like the said Oratorio to be performed in his theatre where there are tenors of the first order, sopranos, contraltos etc.

As you can well believe, I said nothing, determining however to write to you about it so as to learn your opinion. It is true that at the Theatre Italien they have Fraschini and Nicolini, who are excellent tenors; it is true also that they have various good sopranos and contraltos (so I'm told) but I don't know whether you would prefer the *Theatre Italien* to the above-mentioned Hall. The Bischoffshein Hall at the moment I'm told is acoustically rather dull because it's only just finished. But it will subsequently improve, I don't doubt. Pacini is pleased with his work. Faure who should have sung at the opening of the hall, did not do so, since M Perrin, Director of the Grand Opera, refused him permission to sing – permission he had already given him.

Write to me at once what you think about the Theatre Italien, so that I can act according to your wishes. If you decide to have the oratorio performed in the said theatre, it would be necessary to reinforce chorus and orchestra. I want it to be a success – do you understand? Embrace your brother. My poor Mass is still in the state in which you left it, and I see that my health does not permit me to occupy myself with it. You'll have to give up the idea you had concerning it.

Costa to Rossini, 26 July 1867. 59 Eccleston Square, London.

My dearest Papa,

Here I am again to bother you about my *Naaman*. M Choudens has been over here for *Romeo et Juliette* and he told me that the Athenaeum is going to be shut down owing to lack of funds. This surprises me very much, above all since the Proprietor and Administrator is a banker. He told me further that Mm Miolan was going on a tour for four months to make money, owing to the fact that her husband has never paid her. Both Choudens and Mr Strakosch urged me again to decide for the theatre, promising to augment the orchestra and chorus and put a good organ on the stage and to give the oratorio before the Italian season. I replied, as I did before, that I depend entirely on you. However I would like to know whether this news about the Athenaeum is true and if you will send me a line about it I shall be very grateful. Immediately after the Birmingham Festival, I shall be in Paris, in the first days of September. I hope you are in excellent health.

My kindest regards to Madame Rossini. My brother embraces you, and so does your devoted

Michael Costa.

Passy, 28 July 1867.

Dearest Son

...It is an exaggeration to say that the Athenée is to be shut down owing to a lack of funds, but it is also true that this establishment is mute and a bit antipathetic. I wonder whose fault that is? It is true that Mme Miolan is leaving the theatre sometime. Many rumours are current about that. No one however knows officially the true cause!

Coming now to your *Naaman*, which is the thing I have most at heart. If it is true that your oratorio can be performed before the opening of the Italian season, if it is true that the chorus and orchestra are to be augmented, I should be inclined to prefer the *Théâtre Italien* to the Athenée. You will have a better performance in the sympathique theatre than in the antipathetic Athenée. Accept the offer and don't lose time. As for the organ to which you rightly attach so much importance, a way exists to satisfy you, with the help of my friend Cavaillé-Colle, the organ-builder, and, if you think fit, I'll take charge of that matter with the utmost zeal. You say nothing about your theatre. I would like to hear something about *Juliette* and *Don Carlos*. You know my discretion; if you write to me about that, you will give me pleasure. Lose no time; get to work, and I'm sure we shall have a big success. The papers say you have composed a cantata for the Sultan. Is it true?...

Your affectionate father and friend,

Passy, 11 Aug 1867.

Beloved Son

Strakosch came to see me at last with dearest Adelina. After he had given me news of your health, which so much concerns me, we spoke of your oratorio. Before going into that, it would be well for you to know that the Athenée has been let for use as a branch of the *Théâtre des Variétés*. See what a summersault this place has turned, which seemed destined to High Enterprises! Poor hopes! Poor Organ! Poor Bischoffsheim! I tell you all this so that you may see that it is not necessary to disengage yourself from the Proprietor of the elevated Athenée, in order to throw yourself into the arms of the Theatre Italien, where you have been promised (in the presence of witnesses) that in addition to the entire personnel of the grand company both choir and orchestra will be augmented for your oratorio. As you see, everything is turning out wonderfully. Strakosch said in conversation that it would be a good thing to give your oratorio in Italian, rather than in French! Not knowing whether this was your idea or his, I let the subject drop. Tell me now if it is your idea. La Grossis the contralto who is a member of the company and has (they tell me) a magnificent voice, must know enough French to perform her role adequately; I say nothing of Patti, of the tenors and basses, for we are rolling

in wealth. Tell me now precisely when you can be in Paris. You won't undertake the journey unless things are signed and sealed between you and M Bagier; in due course i shall see my friend Cavaillé-Colle about the organ, very important for your oratorio. I hope you received my last letter; I suppose you are very busy. I hope however that you will manage to find time to reply to this one, written in too much of a hurry. Perhaps you won't be able to read it!

Love always,

Your affectionate father,

Rossini.

Passy 28 May 1868 [six months before Rossini's death].

Friend, Son and Beloved Colleague

Your Celebrity and my own are a Proper Scourge! Everyone wants to secure our friendship and protection.! We must submit to Destiny and chut! This poor autograph of mine will be presented to you by a Russian colleague, Sig Cav're Lazarew (perhaps not unknown to you). He is a most impassioned, almost rabid music lover. He wants to meet the Great Costa and that is why I am bothering you with these lines. He wants to see Say and the father of the diva Patti, the quondam Marquess. Courage.

Don't forget

Your affectionate

Rossini

Appendix C: Costa's lay-out at the Philharmonic.

The fullest account of Costa's new lay-out at the Philharmonic is given in an article by Gruneisen preserved in the Ella Collection:¹

Every real amateur and well-educated professor seemed to rejoice at the impetus given to art by the unprecedented performance under the direction of Mr Costa – for 'signor' with us he shall be no more – he has morally as well as legally naturalised himself. It is in this country that he has now created two orchestras – it is here that he has established a system of conducting with the baton that is unequalled even in the most celebrated continental bands. The Philharmonic will henceforth be the true sphere of our musical excellence – a nucleus round which all that is great in art must aggregate... What a glorious night was this to the national amateur, who has long boasted of his countrymen's powers and who only panted for the moment when the slumbering energy should be awakened – when there should be really a director qualified to draw forth orchestral eloquence...

We must first refer to the remodelling of the orchestra by Signor (sic) Costa. In the notice of the Ancient Concerts, in Thursday's *Morning Chronicle*, mention was made of the defects of the old plan of the amphitheatre – of its rapid approaches – of its semi-circular gallery reaching up to the roof – of the basses being placed in front of the orchestra and lower than the other players – and of the conductor facing the audience instead of his forces. There glaring mistakes have been pointed out year by year, but it was reserved for the conductor of the present series to carry out radically the reform so long demanded. Two important principles have been attended to in the new arrangement: first the placing of the instruments for their proper blending of tone; and secondly the disposition of the players themselves. The latter are now no longer distributed at random, but the conductor's intimate knowledge of their several qualities has been turned to account most advantageously. Thus a strong executant backs one who has perhaps more refinement than vigour. Let us take a glance at our artists as they are seated ready for action with their eye on the mastermind who has marshalled them into such formidable array. At the summit is the organ, with the keys immediately in front of the conductor; just below the organist's seat are the drums; to the right and left of the organ are six double basses in the first row from the top; in the second rank, to the left of the organ, looking from the body of the room, is a double bass, 3 violincelli and two trumpets; in the same row to the right are three trombones, three violincelli and a double bass. The third row from the top of the orchestra is occupied by the four horns, the two flutes the two clarionets, the two oboes and the two bassoons. The fourth row has two violins, three tenors to the left, two violincelli in the centre, and three tenors and two violincelli to the right.

¹ Review of March 1846 in unidentified article, probably by Gruneisen, Ella f. 22.

The small platforms on each side are filled with eight violins. In the fifth row to the left are four violins, with four tenors in the centre and four second violins to the right. In the sixth or front row are the principal violin and four eminent colleagues, with the principal violincello and double bass in the centre and four leading second violins to the right. When the pianoforte will be required for any performer it will be placed just before the leading instrumentalists; but for the first time in Philharmonic annals, this ridiculous appendage to an orchestra was dispensed with. [Quotes Fétis letter in the *Revue Musicale*: the piano's 'peculiar tone' if audible would destroy the composer's intention, especially through its sustained notes.] The baton superseded the use of the pianoforte, but at rehearsals it has been the resource of all incompetent conductors.

....There is an enormous amount of talent, for there is no distinction of rank in this band. [Quotes Fétis comparing the Philharmonic (too slow, no fervour or warmth) with the Conservatoire (too fast, greater shading and exaltation)] 'We have got rid of divided authority – we have remodelled the orchestra and we now have a conductor in whom the band has entire confidence – one who is as much liked as he is feared – a despot in his management but the champion at the same time of the ill-paid but intellectual instrumentalists of this country. There can be but one captain of a ship...so in an orchestra a conductor must have a moral influence to direct his forces as well as a thorough knowledge of his duties. Esprit de corps may keep a band together to a certain extent, but in that case the conductor follows the *swing* of the orchestra, instead of creating it by his individuality. The single player looks only to his own part, but it is for the conductor to concentrate all the passages in detail, to determine the spirit of the composer he is charged to interpret. He who wields the baton should be an impersonation of the mind of the composer. He has to combine the qualities of inflexibility and decision with courtesy and quick apprehension. He must be complete master of the component parts of a score and should have the gift of instinctive anticipation of that which ought to be the right expression of the composer's inspirations. It is the possession of all these which renders Costa one of the greatest of European conductors. He has a wonderful comprehension of the proper colouring to be given to a composition. He is as much a poet as a musician; it is not mere learning – mere technical knowledge – he is no mechanical metronome; he indulges in no 'twaddle' about tradition but nature has given him that exquisite sensibility which makes him feel and grasp at once the spirit of musical poetry. [Quotes Schindler's warnings about metronomic markings in his biography of Beethoven, who applied Maetzel's signs only to two symphonies and 4 piano sonatas.]

'If we understand Costa's system correctly, his great point in the blending of instruments is to have sufficient strength of stringed instruments to counter-balance the modern excess of brass and wind instruments. And then above all is the classification of the executants, requiring of course a personal knowledge of the temperament, execution, and trust-worthiness of the individual members of the band. Costa's naturally quick and intelligent method of detecting, and above

all of correcting, mistakes has a marvellous faculty of inspiring confidence among his troops in the most intricate points of attack.

Appendix D: Costa's Compositions

D.1 Operas

Il diletto punito, Naples Conservatoire (1826).

Il sospetto funesto, Naples Conservatoire (1827).

Il carcere d'Ildegonda, Teatro Nuovo, Naples (1827).

La Malvina, San Carlo, Naples (January 1829).

Malek Adhel, Théâtre-Italien Paris (February 1837) and Her Majesty's Theatre London (June 1837). Completed 14 Jan. 1837. Dedicated to Maria Amelia Bourbon.

Libretto by Count Carlo Pepoli, adapted from S Cottin's *Mathilde*. The plot deals with the Third Crusade. Matilda, the sister of Richard the Lionheart, falls into the hands of Saladin's brother, Malek. They fall in love and Malek releases her, but Saladin sends him in disguise to Richard to demand Matilda for Malek as a pledge of peace. To secure her, Malek turns Christian but is attacked by her former fiancé and brought bleeding to Matilda's feet.

Terzetto from *Malek Adhel*, 'Vieni fuggiamo oh caro' with pianoforte accompaniment in the Royal Collection BL R.M.21.e.17.

Romanza di Giosselina, cantata for Albertazzi based on aria 'Il crociato cavaliere sprono verso Palestina' from *Malek Adhel*. Pub. Pacini, Paris and Mori, London. (Fig. D.1).

Don Carlos, Her Majesty's (29 June 1846). Libretto by Leopoldo Tarantini, based on an adaptation by Méry and Du Locle out of Schiller.

Duet from *Don Carlos*, 'Questa volta di è l'ultima', Royal Collection, BL R.M.21.h.18, f8.

Talismano (Balfe's last opera). Completed posthumously by Costa and conducted by Costa at Drury Lane in 1874.

D.2 Operatic Insertions

Insert to Mercadante's *Donna Caritca*. *Times* (27 July 1830).

'Se finor bell'idol mio', recitative and aria for Donizetti's *L'esule di Roma*. King's Theatre (1832). Pub. Ricordi.

Scena added to Pacini's *Gli Arabi nelle Galle*. King's Theatre (1832). *Athenaeum* (19 May 1832), 325.

'Dall'asilo della pace', scena, aria and cabaletta for Giulia Grisi in Rossini's *Le Siège de Corinthe*. King's Theatre, 1834. BL H.2815.e.1; and autograph in RCM MS 161. BL Add MS 32383.

'Detached piece' for Mario in *Lucrezia Borgia*, *ILN* (12 June 1847), 379

Der Freischütz recitatives. Prior press notices stated that they were by Berlioz. *Daily News* and *Times* (18 March 1850). But the *ILN* clarified that ‘The recitatives for the opera have been composed by Costa and not by Berlioz, as our contemporaries have erroneously mentioned.’ *ILN*, (23 March 1850), 190. Costa may have taken Berlioz’ recitatives as a basis, since they had been used by the Italian Opera House in Berlin in 1850 and, according to Cairns’ (*Berlioz*, vol. 2, 443), Covent Garden bought the Berlioz recitatives. But there was no sign of Berlioz’ version in the Covent Garden production, to which Costa added cymbals, bass drum and ophicleide (vol. 2, 460).

Recitatives and an additional chorus for Cherubini’s *Les Deux Journées*. Her Majesty’s in 1872.

‘Dolce calma, Oh Dio’, aria for Tamburini for insertion in Paer’s *Agnese*.

‘Quando guerriero mio splendido’, cavatina for solo with pianoforte accompaniment, arranged by Costa from Mercadante’s *I Briganti*. R.M.21.g.10.

D.3 Ballets

Kenilworth. King’s Theatre (1 March 1831). Billed as a ‘national’ ballet.

Une heure à Naples. King’s Theatre (7 February 1832).

Le Sire Huon, a vehicle for Marie Taglioni. King’s Theatre (1834?).

Alma or *La Fille du Feu*, danced by Fanny Cerito. Her Majesty’s (23 June 1842).

Faust, J Perrot, La Scala Milan (1848). New Grove, vol. 6, 525.

D.4 Oratorios¹

La Passione, Naples (c1827).

Eli, commissioned by the Birmingham Festival (1855). Dedicated to the Queen. The soloists included Clara Novello, Viardot, Formes and Reeves. Score dated 31 July 1865. BL Add MS 32384.

Naaman, commissioned by the Birmingham Festival (1867). It describes some of the miracles of Elisha, in particular the curing of the Syrian Captain Naaman. Score dated 29 Feb. 1864. BL Add MS 32386.

D.5 Cantatas

L’immagine, cantata, Naples (1825).

Dixit Dominus, Naples (c1827).

¹ There are scores containing Costa’s additional orchestration for J.S. Bach cantatas no. 34 (‘O Ewiges Feuer’) and no. 50 (‘Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich’) in the Vaughan Williams MSS at BL 1. 475.o; and for various Handel oratorios at the RCM and Foundling Museum London.

4 masses, Naples (c1827).

Agnus Dei, setting for 4 voices with pianoforte accompaniment. Autograph and signed Dec. 14 1843. R.M.21.e.13 and R.M.21.e.14.

Date sonitum, offertorium for bass and chorus. Birmingham (1849). Full score dated 1833. RCM MS 5213 and BL Add MS 32383.

Praise Ye the Lord, cantata for the opening of the Albert Hall (1871).

Ti Prego, O padre eterno, trio by Karl Friedrich Curschman, orchestrated by Costa. BL RPS MS 42 f.13. Full autograph score BL Add MS 65389. BL RPS MS 42

Sing Praises unto his Name. Organ cantata. RCM MS 834 (1)

Invocazione all'Armonia, by Prince Albert, full score by Costa. R.M.18.a.10 and autograph R.M.18.a.5.

D.6 Instrumental works

3 'sinfonie' for large orchestra, Naples (c1827/8).

Presto for piano (dated Dec. 1848). RCM MS 9090.

Sonata for Cello and piano (dated 20 Sept. 1860). RCM MS 164.

March for the installation of the Prince of Wales as Masonic Grand Master (1875).
Staffordshire Sentinel (28 April 1875).

D.7 Arias, songs etc²

'Perfido di che tenti', scena and aria for Adelaide Tosi, San Carlo (c1828). Copy at Opera Rara library London.

'Non è la vaga rosa', trio. Probably composed in Naples. Copy at Opera Rara library London.

Quattro ariette e due notturni per camera, composed and dedicated to D. Giovannina de Rogati. Pub. Girard, Naples. (c1827).

'Dunque in un mar d'affani'.

'Co'squardi lusinghie che a me tu volgi'.

'Se da lungi una voce tu senti'.

'Dove sei mio ben mia vita'.

'Prima alla sue pendice'.

'Se chieggo al cavo speco m'ama la bella Cloride'.

Sei ariette for SSTTB. (? 1826/7). Pub. Girard, Naples.

² Florimo reports that there are other works preserved in the library of the Naples Conservatoire. *La scuola musicale di Napoli e i suoi conservatori*.

- ‘Fra l’orrore di notte funesta’.
- ‘Vieni Fillide alla sponde’.
- ‘Dormi in pace nel sono di morte.’
- ‘Quel fior che miri’.
- ‘Perchè due cor insieme’.
- ‘Felice età dell’oro’.
- ‘Remember, Love’, ballad to words by Mrs. C. R. Huxley, pub. Willis and Co. *The Harmonicon*, (April 1831), vol. IX, no. 4, 91-2.
- ‘Eseguito ne’ concerti dati nella sala del King's Theatre’, quartetto a canone, pub. Mori and Lavenu, *The Harmonicon* (Feb. 1831), vol IX, no. 2, 91-2.
- ‘Praticel di fiori adorno’, arietta, *The Harmonicon* (1833), 63.
- ‘Vanne a colei che adoro’, terzetto a canone for Castellan, Mario and Reeves. Birmingham (1849), but probably composed in the 1830s. BL R.M.21.e.18.
- ‘Ecco quel fiero istante’ (Farewell to Nice), quartet for Pasta, Malibran, Rubini and Tamburini, dedicated to Lord Burghersh (1833). Words by Metastasio. Pub. Ricordi.
- Eloisa*, scena, aria and cabaletta ‘Suon profondo’, composed for Maria Malibran at the King’s Theatre (1836) and inserted by Viardot in Rossini’s *Otello* at Her Majesty’s (1839). Full score 1840, RCM MS 5216. Pub. Pacini (Paris) and Mori (London).
- Scena e Aria composta espressamente e dedicata a Maria Malibran de Beriot*, King’s Theatre (1836). Opera Rara library London.
- ‘Vanne e la cara immagine’, with pianoforte accompaniment (autograph May 18, 1837). BL R.M.24.1.14
- Matilde*, scena (1839). RCM MS 5215.
- ‘La Danza’, song for 4 voices; with pianoforte accompaniment (autograph 30 Jan. 1845). BL R.M.21.e.15 and BL R.M.21.e.16.
- ‘Il Pensiero a Nina’, ‘composed expressly for his friend Henry Greville’ (1840). BL MC. G.426.rr/10.
- ‘Uno sguardo e un sospiro’, dedicated to Miss Georgina Willis. Pub. Willis and Costa, BL H.1980.aa/5
- ‘T’intendo sì mio core’, notturno for soprano and tenor. Pub. Willis and Costa,
- ‘Ah! Non v’è cosa più bella’, arietta dedicated to ***. BL H. 1980.aa/2.
- ‘Che Chiedi? Che Brami?’, duet dedicated to Lady Shelley. Pub. Mori and Lavenu, BL H.1654. ee./16
- ‘L’Ultimo addio’. BL H. 1771.d/26.

‘Pur nel sonno’, duet dedicated to Malibran. Pub. Mori and Lavenu.

‘T’amai qual’aman gli angeli’, romanza to words by Tarantini.

‘Trova un sol’, quartet a canone, dedicated to Malibran.

‘Una barchetta in mar’, dedicated to Miss Kynaston. BL H.345.h/11.

‘Mourn Erin. Lament on death of Sir John Stevenson’. Words by Miss Costello. BL H 1654. p/7

‘A Serpina penserete’, aria with pianoforte accompaniment arranged from Pergolesi’s *La Serva Padrona*. BL R.M.21.h.18.(14.)

‘Ah ritorna età’, aria and recitative by Mendelssohn, with piano accompaniment arranged by Costa. R.M.21.g.6.

D.8 Miscellaneous vocal and Choral

‘La Carita’, chorus by Rossini, arranged with orchestral accompaniment, (April, 1845). BL Add MS 32387.

The Dream (16 Jan. 1858). Serenata commissioned for the marriage of Princess Victoria to Frederick William. Soloists: Clara Novello, Sims Reeves, Weiss. Performed at Birmingham 1858. BL Add MS 32385.

Ethelburga (serenata) for the wedding of the Prince of Wales (1863). Libretto by Bartholomew. RA II 63 Gall B/b. Autograph score RCM MS 162; piano score RCM MS 163. BL Add MS 32386.

All honour to the King (national hymn for the King of Prussia). 1870. BL H.654.qq.

National Anthem, reorchestration, still being used at the Queen’s Jubilee in 1896.

D.9 Discography

‘T’amai qual’aman gli angeli’, Bruce Ford. Opera Rara ORR235.

‘Perchè due cor insieme’, Laura Claycomb, Manuela Custer, Bruce Ford, Brindley Sherratt. Opera Rara ORR227.

‘Felice età dell’oro’, Laura Claycomb, Manuela Custer, Bruce Ford, Brindley Sherratt, Dominic Natoli. Opera Rara ORR227.

‘Vanne a colei che adoro’, Majella Cullach, Antonio Siragusa, Bruce Ford. Opera Rara ORR223.

‘Non è la vaga rosa’, Manuela Custer, Jennifer Larmore, Antonio Siragusa. Opera Rara ORR223.

‘Ecco quel fiero istante’, Jennifer Larmore, Majella Cullach, Russell Smythe, Bruce Ford. Opera Rara ORR223.

‘Dall’assilo della Pace’, *L’assedio di Corinto*. Nelly Miricioiu, David Parry, London Philharmonic Orchestra. Opera Rara ORR217

‘Eloisa’, scena, aria and cabaletta ‘Suon profondo’. Jennifer Larmore. London Philharmonic Orchestra, Antolello Allemandi. Opera Rara ORR231.

Romanza di Giosselino
Cantata dalla Signa ALBERTAZZA.
NELL'OPERA
MALEK-ADEL
Del maestro
ME GOSTA
PRIZ: 5.
A PARIS Chez PACINI Boulevard des Italiens N°11.
A LONDRES Chez MORI.

N° 2 *Andantino mosso.*

Giosselino.

PIANO.

Recit.
Mi-se-ro cor tu gemi o'-
-giora cr-la-to e solo e in a-moroso

55/52

Fig. D.1 Giosselina's aria from *Malek Ahdel*.

Appendix E: Philharmonic Repertoire

E.1 Philharmonic: Composition of programmes

Year	Symphony/ overture	Other instrumental	Choral	Aria
1834	32	13	4	26
1835	32	16		31
1836	32	15		32
1840	32	16		32
1841	29	15	2	28
1842	32	17		32
1843	34	12	3	34
1844	27	15	6	24
1845	30	17	1	29
1846	30	12	2	22
1847	30	9	1	27
1848	33	8	4	28
1849	28	9	2	28

E.2 Philharmonic: Average number of works per concert

Year	Symphony / concerto	Chamber/ concerto	Vocal	Choral
1840-45	3.7	1.7	3.6	0.2
1846-49	3.8	1.2	3.0	0.3

E.3 Philharmonic: Symphonies performed (by Composers)

Five years to	Beethoven	Mozart	Haydn	Mendelssohn	Spohr	Others
1817	14	16	27		3	16
1822	19	23	23		2	16
1827	33	17	22		5	5
1832	30	18	20	2	7	4
1837	30	16	14	3	8	8
1842	32	16	14	1	5	5
1847	35	13	11	5	5	3
1852	34	14	9	9	5	3
1857	33	10	6	8	3	7

E.4 Philharmonic repertoire (by Composers)

5 years ending	Beethoven Mozart Haydn	Potentially 'canonical' composers	Others	Total
1847	83 (26%)	74 (35%)	51 (24%)	208
1852	82 (26%)	67 (35%)	45 (23%)	192

E.5 Philharmonic: Overall repertoire.

Years	Canonical	Potentially 'canonical' composers	Other
1813-5	172 (58%)	45 (15%)	78 (26%)
1823-5	203 (68%)	40 (13%)	54 (18%)
1833-5	172 (56%)	49 (16%)	74 (24%)
1843-5	302 (60%)	99 (19%)	105 (21%)
1853-4	215 (67%)	49 (15%)	56 (18%)

E.6 New works as a percentage of the operatic repertoire

Years	Percentage of performances new to the major opera houses
1820s	40%
Lumley 1841-52, 56	22%
Gye 1848-58	23%
Mapleson 1861-7, 71-8	10%
Gye 1861-78	8%

Notes on Tables E.4 and E.5.

In order to make a broad comparison between the make-up of Philharmonic programmes over several decades:

1. weighting has been ascribed to individual works as follows: Symphony = 4; Concerto = 3; Overture, serenade or quartet etc = 2; Vocal and instrumental solos = 1. A substantial choral work (eg Mendelssohn's *Walpurgisnacht*) has

been rated 3, while a light concertino piece (eg a single movement from Sivori's Violin Concerto) is graded 2.

2. a distinction has been made between 'canonical' composers (Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and also Palestrina, Bach, Handel, Gluck), 'Potentially canonical' composers (those who were considered at the time to be their descendants (Mendelssohn, Weber, Chopin, but also Cherubini, Hummel, Salieri, Spohr, Cimarosa, Winter, Ries etc) and the rest. It is recognised that this categorisation involves value judgements which are necessarily arbitrary but it permits the broad comparisons of repertoire which are needed for this thesis.

Bibliography

a. Original manuscripts

Davison, J.W., J. W. Davison Papers, Music Collections, British Library, London.

Ella, John, John Ella Collection, Faculty of Music Library, University of Oxford.

Ella, John, Record of the Musical Union (1845–55), John Ella Collection, Oxford; 1845–80, BL; 1881, RCMA).

Gye, Frederick, Diaries, ROHC and London Theatre Museum.

Journal of the Society of Arts, The Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, John Adam Street, London.

Smart, George, Papers, Music Collections, British Library, London.

b. Primary Sources

Adam, Adolfe, *Souvenirs d'un Musicien* (Paris: Lévy, 1868).

Anon: (An Amateur), *Her Majesty's Theatre* (London: 1838).

Arditi, Luigi, *My Reminiscences* (London: Skeffington, 1897).

Barnett, John Francis, *Musical Reminiscences and Impressions* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1906).

Becker, Heinz and Gudrun, eds, *Giacomo Meyerbeer, Briefwechsel und Tagebücher* (Berlin: 1885, vol. 4).

Benedict, Julius, *Sketch of the Life and Works of the Late Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy* (London: Murray, 1850).

Bennett, Joseph, *Forty Years of Music: 1865–1905* (London: Methuen, 1908).

Bennett, James Robert, *Life of William Sterndale Bennett by his Son* (Cambridge: 1909)

Berlioz, Hector, *Correspondence Generale*, ed. Pierre Citron (Paris: 1872).

Berlioz, Hector, *Grand Traité d'Instrumentation et d'Orchestration Modernes* (Paris: Schonenberger, 1843). (Supplement, 1885, trans Cowden (London: Novello, 1858),

Berlioz, Hector, *The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz*, tr. and ed. David Cairns (London: Gollancz, 1969).

Berlioz, Hector, *Les Soirées d'Orchestre*, ed. Léon Guichard (Paris: Gründ, 1968).

Bowley, Robert, *Account of the re-opening of the Crystal Palace*, RCM Centre for Musical Performance Collection.

- Bowley, Robert, *The Sacred Harmonic Society: a thirty-five year retrospect* (London: private printing, 1867).
- Bunn, Alfred, *The Stage, both before and behind the curtain* (London: Richard Bentley, 1840).
- Busby, Thomas, *A Complete Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed. (London: Gillet, 1806; reissue with amendments 1840).
- Carlyle, Thomas, *On Heroes, Hero-worship and the Heroic in History* (London: James Frazer, 1841).
- Chorley, Henry, *Music and Manners in France and Germany* (London: Longmans, 1841).
- Chorley, Henry, *Thirty Years of Musical Recollections*, ed. Ernest Newman, (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926).
- Colles, H.C., *The Royal Philharmonic*, prepared in 1937 but marked 'unpublished because of its own inadequacies and because of the inadequacy of demand'. (Note of 2 Jan. 1984). BL RPS MS416.
- Cowen, Frederick, *My Art and my Friends* (London: Arnold, 1913).
- Cox, H.B. and Cox, C.L.E., *Leaves from the Journal of Sir G. Smart* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1907).
- Cox, John Edmund, *Musical Recollections of the Last Half-Century* (London: Lensley Bros, 1872).
- Crotch, William, ed., *G. F. Handel, Anthems for the Coronation of King George IV* (London: Handel Society, 1844).
- Davison, Henry, *From Mendelssohn to Wagner, Being the memoirs of J.W. Davison, forty years music critic of "The Times"* (London: Wm Reeves, 1912).
- Deldevez, E.M.E., *L'Art du Chef d'Orchestre* (Paris: 1878).
- Devrient, Edward, *My Recollections of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy*, trans. Macfarren (London: 1869).
- Ebers, John, *Seven Years of the King's Theatre* (London: 1828).
- Elek, Paul, ed., *Felix Mendelssohn's Letters* (London: Cole, 1946).
- Florimo, F., *La scuola musicale di Napoli e i suoi conservatori* (Naples: 1882).
- Ella, John, *Musical Sketches Abroad and at Home* (London: Ridgway, 1869).
- Fétis, F.-J., *Curiosities Historiques de la Musique* (Paris: 1830).
- Fétis, F.-J., 'M. Fétis on the State of Music in London', *The Harmonicon* (1829).
Later published as part of *Music Explained to the World* (London: Clarke, 1844).
- F. Florimo, *La scuola musicale di Napoli e i suoi conservatori* (Naples: 1882).

- Graves, Charles L., *The Life and Letters of Sir George Grove* (London: Macmillan, 1903).
- Grove, George, ed., *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: 1879–89, 1904–10, 1927, 1940). New Grove 1 (1980). New Grove 2 (2001).
- Gruneisen, Charles Lewis, *The Opera and the Press* (London: 1869).
- Gruneisen, Charles Lewis, *Memoir of Meyerbeer, with notices, historical and critical, of his celebrated operas*, ed. C. L. Gruneisen (London: Brettell, 1848).
- Haight, G.S., ed., *The George Eliot Letters* (New Haven: Yale, 1978).
- Halle, Charles, *The Life and Letters of Sir Charles Halle* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1896).
- Haweis, Hugh Reginald, *My Musical Life* (London: 1856).
- Hensel, Sebastian, *The Mendelssohn Family, (1729–1847) from letters and journals*, tr. and ed. C Klingermann (London: S. Low, 1882).
- Hogarth, George, *Memoires of the Opera* (London: Robert Cox, 1890).
- Hogarth, George, *Philharmonic Society of London from its Foundation, 1813, To Its 50th Year* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1862)
- Hueffer, Francis, *Half a Century of Music in England* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1889).
- Klein, Herman, *The Golden Age of Opera* (London: G. Routledge & Sons, 1933).
- Klein, Herman, *Musicians and Mummers* (London: Cassell, 1925).
- Klein, Herman, *The Reign of Patti* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1920).
- Klein, Herman, *Thirty Years of Musical Life* (London: Heinemann, 1903).
- Klingemann, C., *The Mendelssohn Family (1729–1847): Letters and Journals*, tr. Klingemann (New York: Harper, 1882).
- Kuhe, Wilhelm, *My Musical Recollections* (London: Richard Bentley, 1896).
- Lumley, Benjamin, *The Earl of Dudley, Mr Lumley and Her Majesty's Theatre: A Narrative of Facts Addressed to the Patrons of the Opera, his Friends and the Public Generally* (London: Bosworth and Harrison, 1863).
- Lumley, Benjamin, *Reminiscences of the Opera* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1864).
- Macfarren, Walter, *Memories, An Autobiography* (London: Walter Scott, 1905).
- Giacomo Meyerbeer, A Life in Letters*, ed. Heinz and Gudrun Becker, tr. Mark Violette (London: Helm, 1983).
- Mount-Edgcumbe, Robert, *Musical Reminiscences* (London: John Andrews, 1834).
- Mozart, Wolfgang, *The Letters of Mozart to his Family*, trans. E. Anderson (London: Macmillan, 1985).
- Murray, John, *The World of London* (London: Murray, 1851).

- Nathan, Hans and Frances Fink, 'Autograph Letters of Musicians at Harvard', *Notes* (Harvard: Music Library Association, Sept. 1948), Second Series, vol. 5, no. 4.
- Parke, W.T., *Musical Memoirs*, 2 vols (London, 1830).
- Peacock, Thomas Love, *Collected Essays* (London: Constable and Co., 1926).
- Phillips, Henry, *Musical and Personal Recollections during half a century* (London: C.J. Skeat, 1864).
- Planche, J.R., *Recollections and Reflections of J.R. Planche* (London: Sampson and Low, 1901, first pub. 1872).
- Reeves, J. Sims, *Life and Recollections* (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co, 1888).
- Reeves, J. Sims, *My Jubilee or Fifty Years of Artistic Life* (London: Musical Publishing Company, 1889).
- Rosenthal, C., ed., *The Mapleson Memoirs: The career of an operatic impresario 1858–88* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1888).
- Rousseau, *Dictionnaire de Musique* (Paris: Duchesne, 1768).
- Santley, Charles, *Student and Singer: The Reminiscences of Charles Santley* (London: Edward Arnold, 1892).
- Saxe Wyndham, Henry, *Annals of Covent Garden Theatre 1732–1897* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1906).
- Spark, William, *Musical Memories*, 3rd edn (London: W Reeves, 1909).
- Spark, William, *Musical Reminiscences, Past and Present* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton and Kent, 1892).
- Spohr, Louis, *Autobiography* (London: Longmans, 1865).
- Stanford, C.V., *Interludes records and reflections* (London: John Murray, 1921).
- Stanford, C.V., *Pages from an Unwritten Diary* (London: Edward Arnold, 1914).
- Strakosch, Maurice, *Souvenirs d'un Impresario* (Paris: 1887).
- Thackeray, W.M., *Miscellaneous Prose and Verse* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1835).
- Wagner, Richard, *On Conducting*, trans. Dannreuther (London: 1897).
- Wagner, Richard, *My Life*, trans. anon. (London: Constable 1911).
- Weingartner, Felix, *On Conducting*, trans. E. Newman (London: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1906).
- Yates, Edmund, *His Recollections and Experiences* (London: Bentley, 1884).
- Zavadini, G., *Donizetti: Vita – Musiche – Epistolare* (Bergamo: 1948).

c. Secondary Sources

- Abbiati, Franco, *Giuseppe Verdi*, 4 vols (Milan: Riccordi, 1959).

- Acton, Harold, *The Last Bourbons of Naples 1825–61* (London: Methuen, 1956).
- Austern, Linda Phyllis, 'Alluring the Auditorie to Effeminacy', *Music and Letters*, 74 (1993), 343–54.
- Barrett, William, *Balfe: his life and work* (London: Remington 1882).
- Barzun, Jacques, *Berlioz and his Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1956).
- Bashford, Christina, *The pursuit of High Culture. John Ella and Chamber Music in Victorian London* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007).
- Bashford, Christina, *Music and British culture, 1785–1914 : essays in honor of Cyril Ehrlich*, Christina Bashford and Leanne Langley, eds (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- Beale, Robert Charles *Halle, a Musical Life* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).
- Beale, Willert, *The Light of Other Days: Seen through the Wrong End of an Opera Glass* (London: Richard Bentley, 1890).
- Beedell, A.V., *The Decline of the English Musician 1788–1888* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).
- Biddlecombe, George, *English Opera from 1834 to 1864, with particular reference to the works of Michael Balfe* (London: Garland, 1994).
- Bird, Martin 'A very good idea at the time: Sir Edward Elgar – Principal Conductor, London Symphony Orchestra', *Elgar Society Journal*, vol. 17, no. 1 (April 2011), 22–36.
- Blanning, Tim, 'The Commercialisation and Sacralisation of European Culture in the Nineteenth-Century', T.C.W. Blanning, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
- Bledsoe, Henry, *Henry Fothergill Chorley* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998).
- Booth, Michael R., *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- Bowen, Jose Antonio, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Conducting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- Brown, Clive, *Louis Spohr; A Critical Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
- Budden, Julian, *The Operas of Verdi* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1992).
- Cairns, David, *Berlioz*, 2 vols (London: Andre Deutsch, 1989 and 1999).
- Caldwell, John, ed., *Oxford History of English Music*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- Carnelly, John, 'Sir George Smart and the Evolution of British Musical Culture 1800–1840' (Ph.D. diss., Goldsmiths College, University of London, 2008).
- Carse, Adam, *Life of Jullien* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1951).

- Carse, Adam, *The Orchestra from Beethoven to Berlioz* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1948).
- Charlton, David, 'A maître d'orchestre . . . conducts: New and Old Evidence on French Practice', *Early Music* 21 (1993), 341–353.
- Chissell, J., *Clara Schumann* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1983).
- Christiansen, Rupert, *The Visitors* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2000).
- Clark, Ronald, *The Royal Albert Hall* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1983).
- Cone, John Frederick, *Adelina Patti, Queen of Hearts* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994).
- Cooper, Victoria, *The house of Novello: practice and policy of a Victorian music publisher, 1829–1866* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).
- Cowgill, Rachel and Gabriella Dideriksen,, 'Opera orchestras in Georgian and early Victorian London,' *The Opera orchestra in 18th and 19th century Europe*, vol. 1 (Berlin: B.W.V., 2008).
- Crowest, F.J., *Musician's Wit, Humour and Anecdote* (London: Scott, 1902).
- Davey, Henry, *History of English Music* (London: J. Curwen and Sons, 1895).
- Davison, Henry, *From Mendelssohn to Wagner, Being the memoirs of J.W. Davison, forty years music critic of "The Times"* (London: Wm Reeves, 1912).
- Dideriksen, Gabriella, 'Repertory and Rivalry: Opera at the Second Covent Garden Theatre 1830–56' (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1997).
- de Bekker, ed., *Black's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Black, 1911 and 1924).
- Eaglefield-Hull, A., *A Dictionary of Modern Music and Musicians* (London: Dent, 1924).
- Edwards, F.G., *The History of Mendelssohn's Elijah* (London: Novello, 1896).
- Edwards, F.G., *Musical Haunts of London* (London: Curwen, 1895).
- Edwards, H. Sutherland, *The Prima Donna* (London: Remington, 1888).
- Ehrlich, Cyril, *First Philharmonic, A History of the Royal Philharmonic Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).
- Ehrlich, Cyril, *Harmonious Alliance. A History of the Performing Right Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
- Ehrlich, Cyril, *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).
- Ehrlich, Cyril, *The Piano* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
- Einstein, Alfred, *Music in the Romantic Era* (London: Dent, 1947).
- Elkin, Robert, *Annals of the Royal Philharmonic* (London: Rider and Co., 1946).
- Flanders, Judith, *Consuming Passions, leisure and pleasure in Victorian Britain* (London: Harper Press, 2006).

- Forbes, Elizabeth, *Grisi and Mario* (London: Gollancz, 1985).
- Forbes, Elizabeth, 'Letters between Frederick Gye and Michael Costa from 1847 to 1868', *About the House*, vol. II, no. 10 (May 1968), 42–47.
- Ford, Ernest, *A Short History of Music in England* (London: Sampson Low and Co., 1912).
- Foster, Myles Birkett, *History of the Royal Philharmonic Society of London: 1813–1912* (London: John Lane, 1912).
- Fuhrmann, Christina, 'Continental Opera Englished, English Opera Continentalised, *Der Freischütz* in London, 1824', *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 1/1 (2004), 115–42.
- Fuller Maitland, J.A., *A Door-keeper of Music* (London: John Murray, 1929).
- Fuller-Maitland, English Music in the XIXth Century (London: Grant Richards, 1902).
- Galatopoulos, Stelios, *Bellini, His Life and Times* (London: Sanctuary Publishing Ltd., 2002).
- Galkin, Elliott W., *A History of Orchestral Conducting in Theory and Practice* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1989).
- Galton, Francis, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into its Laws and Consequences* (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd, 1914).
- Ganz, A.W., *Berlioz in London* (London: Quality Press 1950).
- Giulini, M.F., *Giuditta Pasta e suoi tempi* (Milan: 1935).
- Goehr, Lydia, *The Imaginary Musical Museum* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- Hall-Witt, Jennifer L., *Fashionable Acts: Opera and Elite Culture in London 1780–1880* (University of New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2007).
- Hall-Witt, Jennifer L., 'The refashioning of Fashionable Society: Opera-going and Sociability in Britain 1821–61' (Ph.D. diss. Yale University, 1996).
- Hall-Witt, Jennifer L., 'Representing the Audience in the Age of Reform: Critics and the Elite at the Italian Opera in London', Christina Bashford and Leanne Langley, eds, *Music and British culture, 1785–1914: essays in honour of Cyril Ehrlich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- Hallmark, Rufus, 'Historical Musicology', Joan Peyser, ed., *The Orchestra, Origins and Transformations* (New York: Watson-Guptill, 2004).
- Handley, E. and Kinna, M., *Royal Opera House, A History from 1732* (London: 1978).
- Hewlett, Henry G., ed., *Henry Fothergill Chorley: Autobiography, Memoir and Letters* (London: Bentley, 1873).
- Holman, Peter, 'The British Isles: Private and Public Music', *Companion to Baroque Music* (New York: 1990).

- Hoppen, K. Theodore, *The Mid-Victorian Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- Hughes, Meirion, and Robert Stradling, *The English Musical Renaissance and the Press 1840–1940*, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).
- Hullah, John, *The Story of Modern Music* (London: Longmans, 1861, revised 1875).
- Jacobs, A., ‘Spohr and the Baton’, *Music and Letters*, xxxi (1950), 307–17.
- Kennedy, Michael, *The Halle Tradition: a century of music* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960).
- Kenney, Charles Lamb, *A Memoir of Balfe* (London: Tinsley Bros, 1875).
- Kohler, Joachim, *Richard Wagner, The Last of the Titans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).
- Koury, Daniel J., *Orchestral Performance Practices in the Nineteenth Century: Size , Proportions and Seating* (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1986).
- Langley, Leanne, ‘The Musical Press in Nineteenth-Century England’, *Music Library Association Notes*, 46 (1990), 583–92.
- Leger-Lomas, Michael, ‘ “Lyra Germanica”: German Sacred Music in Mid-Victorian England’, *German Historical Institute London Bulletin* vol. XXIX, no. 2 (Nov. 2007), 8–43.
- Leppard, Raymond, *On Music, An Anthology of Critical and Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Lewis (New York: Pro-Am Music Resources, 1993).
- Locke, Ralph, ‘Nineteenth-century music: quality, quantity and qualities’, *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, 1/1 (2004), 3–41.
- Mandler, Peter, *The English National Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2006).
- Mathieson, Holly, ‘Embodying Music: The Visuality of Three Iconic Conductors in London, 1840–1940’ (MusB thesis, Otago, 2010).
- McVeigh, Simon, ‘The Professional Concert and Rival Subscription Series in London, 1783-1793’, *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle*, no. 22 (1989), 1-135.
- McVeigh, Simon, *Concert Life in London from Mozart to Haydn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
- McVeigh, Simon, ‘The Benefit Concert in Nineteenth-Century London: From “tax on the nobility” to “monstrous nuisance”’, *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies*, vol. 1 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999).
- McVeigh, Simon, ‘The Society of British Musicians 1834–65 and the Campaign for Native Talent’, Christina Bashford and Leanne Langley, eds, *Music and British culture, 1785–1914 : essays in honor of Cyril Ehrlich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

- McVeigh, Simon, 'An Audience for High-class Music: Concert Promoters and Entrepreneurs in Nineteenth-century London', William Weber, ed., *The Musician as Entrepreneur, 1700–1914: Managers, Charlatans and Idealists* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 162–82.
- Milsom, David, 'Mendelssohn and the Orchestra', ed. Siegwart Reichwald, *Mendelssohn in Performance* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008).
- Moore, J.N., *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- Moscheles, Charlotte, *Life of Moscheles* (London: Hurst and Blakett, 1873).
- Musgrave, Michael, *An audience for classical music: the achievement of August Manns at the Crystal Palace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- Musgrave, Michael, 'Changing Values in Nineteenth-Century Performance: The Work of Michael Costa and August Manns', Christina Bashford and Leanne Langley, eds, *Music and British Culture, 1785–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- Musgrave, Michael, *George Grove, music and Victorian Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2002).
- Musgrave, Michael, *The Musical Life of the Crystal Palace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- Nalbach, Daniel, *The King's Theatre 1704–1867* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1972).
- Nardi, P., *Vita di Arrigo Boito* (Milan: Mondo-Dori, 1942).
- Nettel, R., *The Orchestra in England* (London: Cape, 1946).
- Norris, Gerald, *Stanford, the Cambridge Jubilee and Tchaikovsky* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1980).
- Northcott, R., *Life of Sir Henry Bishop* (London: The Press Printers, 1920).
- Pallua, Ulrich, *Eurocentrism, Racism, Colonialism in the Victorian and Edwardian Age* (Heidelberg: 2005).
- Palmer, Fiona, *Vincent Novello (1781–1861)* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).
- Palmer, Fiona, *Dragonetti in England (1794–1846): The Career of a Double Bass Virtuoso* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).
- Pekacz, Lydia, *Musical Biography* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).
- Peyser, Joan, ed., *The Orchestra, Origins and Transformations* (New York: Watson-Guptill, 2004).
- Plumb, J.H., *The Commercialisation of Leisure in Eighteenth Century England* (Reading: University of Reading, 1973).
- Picker, J.M., *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

- Poriss, Hilary, 'A Madwoman's Choice', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 13/1 (2001), 1–28.
- Price, Curtis, Judith Milhous,, and Robert D. Hume, *Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth Century London. Vol. 1: The King's Theatre, Haymarket, 1778–1791* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).
- Pritchard, Brian, 'The music festival and choral societies in England in the 18th and 19th centuries'. PhD thesis (Birmingham, 1986), vol. 2, section C.
- Rainbow, Bernarr, *The Land Without Music* (London: Novello, 1967).
- Reid, Charles, *The Music Monster; A Biography of James William Davison* (London: Quartet Books, 1984).
- Ringel, Matthew L., 'The Dreadful Business of Opera Management', *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 19, no. 1 (Summer 1995), 3–30.
- Ringel, Matthew L., 'Opera in the Donizettian Dark Ages: Management, Competition and Artistic Policy in London 1861–70' (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1996).
- Ringer, A., *The Early Romantic Era between Revolutions 1789 and 1848* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990).
- Rodmell, Paul, *Charles Villiers Stanford* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).
- Rohr, Deborah, *The Careers of British Musicians 1750–1850: A profession of Artisans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- Rosenthal, Harold, *Two Centuries of Opera at Covent Garden* (London: Putnam, 1958).
- Ross, Alex, *The Rest is Noise* (London: Harper, 2007).
- Sachs, Joel, 'The End of the Oratorios', Edmond Strainchamps, ed., *Music and Civilisation. Essays in honour of Paul Henry Lang* (New York: 1984).
- Sachs, Joel, *Kapellmeister Hummel in England and France* (Detroit: Detroit Monographs in Musicology, 1977).
- Sachs, Joel, 'The professionalization of Music' in Alexander Ringer, ed., *The Early Romantic Era between Revolutions 1789 and 1848* (London: Macmillan, 1990).
- Samson, Jim, ed., *Cambridge History of Music. The nineteenth-century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- Samson, Jim, ed., *The Late Romantic Era* (London: Macmillan, 1991).
- Schmitz, Oscar, *Das Land Ohne Musik*, trans. H. Hertzl (London: Jerrolds, 1926).
- Scholes, Percy, *The Mirror of Music 1844–1944* (London: Novello, 1947).
- Schonberg, Harold C., *The Great Conductors* (London: Gollancz, 1967).
- Schuller, Gunther, *The Compleat Conductor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
- Scruton, Roger, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

- Shaw, George Bernard, *Shaw's Music*, ed. Dan H. Lawrence, 3 vols (London: Bodley Head, 1981).
- Shore, Bernard, *The Orchestra Speaks* (London: Longmans, 1938).
- Smith, Anthony D., *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991).
- Smither, Howard E., *The Oratorio in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
- Spitzer, John and Neal Zaslaw, *The Birth of the Orchestra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- Spitzer, John, 'The Entrepreneur-Conductors and their Orchestras', *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, 5/1 (2008), 3–24.
- Sterndale Bennett, James Robert, *Life of William Sterndale Bennett by his Son* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907).
- Sutherland Edwards, H., *The Prima Donna* (London: Emington and Co., 1888).
- Temperley, Nicholas, ed., *The Romantic Age 1800–1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988).
- Temperley, Nicholas, 'Xenophilia in British Musical History', *Nineteenth-Century British Musical Studies* I, ed. Bennett Zon (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 3-19.
- Thackrah, John Richard, *The Royal Albert Hall* (Lavenham: Dalton, 1983).
- Todd, Larry, *Mendelssohn a Life in Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003).
- Tyldesley, William, *Michael William Balfe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).
- Walker, Ernest, *A History of English Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907).
- Warrack, John, *Carl Maria von Weber* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1868).
- Weber, William, 'La culture musicale d'une capitale: l'époque du beau monde à Londres, 1700-1800', *Revue d'histoire moderne & contemporaine*, 49 (2002), 119-39.
- Weber, William, *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste. Concert programming from Haydn to Brahms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
- Weber, William, 'The History of Musical Canon' in *Rethinking Music*, Mark Everist and Nicholas Cook, eds (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 340-59.
- Weber, William, 'The Intellectual Origins of Musical Canon in 18th C England', *Journal of the Society for American Music* (1994), 499-520.
- Weber, William, *Music and the middle class: The social structure of concert life in London, Paris and Vienna between 1830 and 1848* (London: Croom Helm, 1975).
- Weber, William, 'The rise of the Classical Repertoire in Nineteenth-Century Orchestral Concerts', *The Orchestra, Origins and Transformation*, ed. Joan Peyser (New York: Watson-Guption, 2004).

- Weber, William, *The Rise of Musical Classics in Eighteenth Century England: A Study in Canon, Ritual and Ideology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).
- Weliver, Phyllis, *The Musical Crowd in English Fiction, 1840-1910. Class, Culture and Nation* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2006).
- Werner, Eric, *Mendelssohn: A New Image of the Composer and His Age* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963).
- Willeby, Charles, *Masters of English Music* (London: Osgood, 1893).
- Willets, Pamela J., *Beethoven and England* (London: British Museum, 1970).
- Williams, Alistair, *Constructing Musicology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).
- Wollenbert, Susan and Simon McVeigh, *Concert Life in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).
- Young, Percy, *The Concert Tradition* (London: 1965).
- Zon, Bennett, 'Histories of British Music and the Land without Music: National Identity and the Idea of the Hero', *Essays on the History of English Music in Honour of John Caldwell: Style, Performance, Historiography*, ed. Emma Hornby and David Maw (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2010).
- Zon, Bennett, "'Loathsome London': Ruskin, Morris, and Henry Davey's *History of English Music* (1895)", *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 37 (2009), 359–75.